

SPARKS 1929 RICE 1936

BANDWAGON

JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOSTON, ON COLOSSEUM GROUNDS,
FOR A BRIEF SEASON,
COMMENCING MONDAY, **JUNE 16**


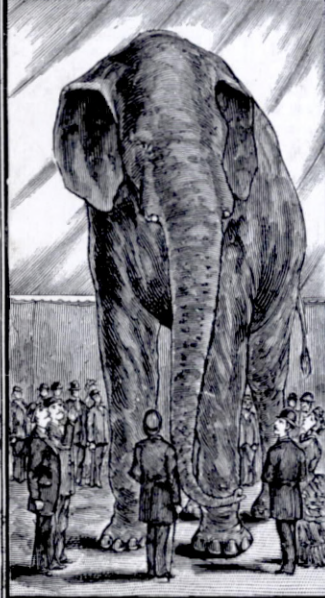

History of the
\$ 200.000.

**SACRED
WHITE ELEPHANT.**

ETHNOLOGICAL CONGRESS OF
SAVAGE AND BARBAROUS
TRIBES

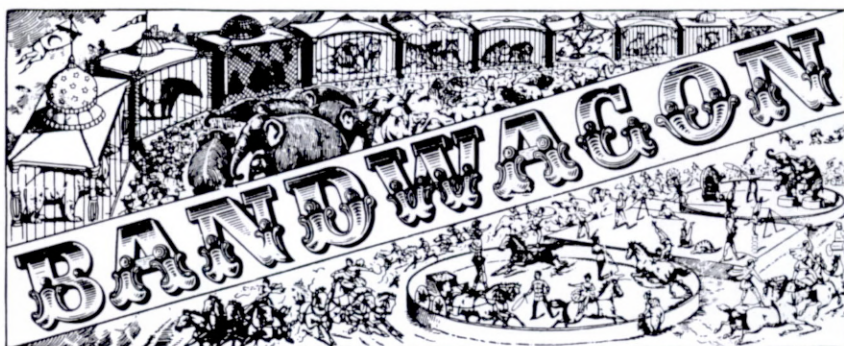
AND BOOK OF

JUMBO.



The Courier Company Show Printing House, Buffalo, N. Y. The Largest in the World; Fire-Proof.

MAY-JUNE 1984



THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

This issue we honor the 1884 season which may have been the high water mark of the circus' impact on the American consciousness. It was a notable year in many respects. The white elephant war between the giant Barnum and Forepaugh shows garnered the most publicity as the two tented behemoths slugged it out in newspaper columns and billboards in the Midwest and East. They so dominated the field that the Sells Bros. Circus, with fifty cages in their menagerie, was only the third best show on tour. Other major circuses included John Robinson, W.W. Cole, John B. Doris, and Burr Robbins. Minor troupes with forgettable and forgotten titles such as Martell & Co., Leo Bros., Middleton Bros., and the New York and Northeastern brought show business to small towns. Two of the crossroads circuses that year had happy destinies. In Peru, Indiana, a livery stable owner named Ben Wallace entered the business with his

own show, and in Baraboo, Wisconsin, a hard luck showman named Yankee Robinson, who probably had not made a dime in the business since about 1869, threw in with five hall show actors to start a circus. He didn't last the season; the show did, and has made it through exactly a hundred more. No one—not even the brothers Ringling—could have imagined the future in the spring of 1884.

White elephants captured the public's imagination that year. One of the remnants of Barnum's and Forepaugh's battle over the merits of their pachyderms was an unusually large amount of advertising material, much of which survives. The example on this month's cover is from the Barnum's and London Circus' June 16-28 date at Boston. Curiously, the show title does not appear on either the front or back cover, and is probably a tribute to the press agents' linking of Jumbo and Barnum in the public mind. Equally strange, Jumbo receives second billing, an indication of the popularity of the albino bull.

This black and white courier, printed by Buffalo's Courier Company, is approximately 11" x 14", and contains sixteen pages, mostly devoted to the show's two elephant stars. In fact, it mentions very little about the performance. Original in Pfening Archives.

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Robert Thomas Kroos #2843
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Brooklyn, New York 11236

Joan E. White #2847
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928 High St.
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The 1984 Circus Historical Society Convention

The Circus Historical Society held its annual convention from May 17-20 in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The gathering coincided with the 100th anniversary of the first performance of the Ringling Bros. Circus in Baraboo on May 19, 1884, and convention goers availed themselves of the many events planned by both the city and the local CFA tent to celebrate the occasion.

Although many members arrived early to do research in the Circus World Museum's superb library or to tour the museum grounds, the meeting officially began with a circus band concert on the evening of May 17. As selections from Karl King, Henry Fillmore, and Russell Alexander and others were played, slides of vintage circus posters, showing the type of act each piece accompanied, were projected upon a screen. During the band's breaks Bob Parkinson shared his knowledge of circus history.

The next morning, Parkinson exhibited many of the Circus World Museum's treasures including many fabulous nineteenth century multiple sheet lithographs. During this showing, Jim Dunwoody presented an extremely rare nine sheet color poster from the 1852 Aron Turner Circus to the museum.

After a luncheon at Pierce's Supper Club, a brief business meeting was held in which president Richard Flint announced that the 1985 convention probably will be held near Somers, New York in June to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the signing of the historic Zoological Institute agreement. He also stated that an appearance by the Big Apple Circus in conjunction with the convention is also in the offering. The members then moved to an adjacent room to hear historical presentations. They included papers by Sarah Blackstone on the lighting of the 1894 Buffalo Bill Wild West, by Fred Dahlinger on the circus' relationship with the railroads, and by Richard Flint on the Courier Lithograph Co., and the Ringling circus. The latter was augmented with slides of many fine Courier posters.

After a break, the papers resumed. The busy Sarah Blackstone discussed the attitudes and treatment of Indians on the Buffalo Bill Wild West, and Gordon Yadon broke up the audience many times with his lively biography of the nefarious Bunk Allen. John Polacsek concluded the session with a paper on the 1882 W.C. Coup Circus. Many of these presentations will appear in future issues of the *Bandwagon*.

The banquet was held that evening at Pierce's. Among the approximate-



The Lion and Mirror bandwagon rolls past the mural, left rear, honoring the Ringlings during the May 19th ceremonies. John Polacsek photo.

ly 100 in attendance were Kenneth Feld, president of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, his wife Bonnie, and Ruth Kelley, widow of Bev Kelley. Dick Flint presented a check for \$100 on behalf of the CHS to the Circus World Museum's library endowment during the meal. Afterwards, the second annual CHS circusiana auction was held. A larger number of items were put on the block than last year, including such notable pieces as checks signed by some of the Ringling brothers, a pristine copy of Bryan's two volume edition of Barnum's life, a Chang and Eng handbill, an early Ringling route book, and many lithographs from the 1930s and 1940s. The bidding was spirited and at times comical. More than \$1600 was raised from the auction, which will be used for the *Bandwagon*.

The Ringling brothers and their magnificent achievement was the focus on Saturday, May 19, the 100th anniversary of their first performance. The festivities began late in the morning as the local circus band held forth on the court house grounds. Soon after, a mini-parade appeared which was composed of an owner's buggy, the Lion and Mirror bandwagon, the Great Britain bandwagon, and the Woodcock elephants. The parade also included many dignitaries, including the Felds, Frosty Little, Ringling-Barnum producing clown, the mayor of Baraboo, and the governor of Wisconsin. It made its way around the court house square for a series of dedications.

The first stop was for the dedication of a mural commemorating the Ringlings. Frosty Little cut a huge cake

which was devoured by both towners and circus fans. The court house square was the next stop where a Memorial Wall had been erected. A gift to the city from Irvin Feld and Kenneth Feld, the wall includes a brass plaque, which salutes the Ringlings, and cast aluminum plaques embedded along the wall's perimeter which list the many Baraboo showfolk and shows. The final stop was near the post office, where a plaque was unveiled commemorating the site where the Ringling Bros. first pitched their tent. Many CHS members were involved in the planning of the events, and all members helped observe the historic occasion.

That evening the conventioners attended the Gollmar-Moeller-Ringling Tent's annual banquet at the former Al Ringling home. Tom Parkinson was master of ceremonies to the crowd of about 300. A skit depicting the early career of the Ringling brothers, and Kenneth Feld's lucid remarks about today's Greatest Show on Earth were among the evening's highlights. It was a magical and memorable affair.

The convention concluded with a "blow off" brunch at Pierce's the next morning, after which the members began their trek home. It was a fine convention with much to do, and many new and old friends with whom to visit. The stars of the meeting were undoubtedly the five Wisconsin brothers who laid the first bricks of an empire 100 years ago. Their legacy includes, of course, the two tremendous circuses bearing their name, and in their home town, the Al Ringling Theater, and the Circus World Museum, located on the site of their former winter quarters. The latter is a national shrine to circus historians, and played a large part in the convention's success. Fred D. Pfening, III.

SPARKS CIRCUS

Foreword: The narrative of this story begins immediately following the conclusion of the history of the Sparks Circus by Gordon Carver in the May-June 1979 Bandwagon. Carver had covered the Sparks show from its beginning on through the end of the 1928 season which was at Columbus, Georgia on November 6. The show then moved to its winterquarters at Central City Park, Macon, Ga. The various installments of Carver's history were spread out over a period of several years. All are still in print and can be obtained from the editor. Valuable background material in these articles will not be repeated here. Considerable use will be made of various documents, financial letters, and otherwise from the files of the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wis. in relating the story of the 1929 Sparks season. The author also acknowledges valuable information he obtained from the late E.W. Adams who was on the show for several months as a ticket seller during the season.

Tradition has long held that Jerry Mugivan and his partners in the American Circus Corporation (Bert Bowers and Edward Ballard) had been interested in acquiring the Sparks property from its principal owner and manager, Charles Sparks for several years but that Sparks had refused to sell to him. It has often been said that Sparks, whose reputation as king of the Sunday School shows is unsurpassed, objected to the way Mugivan operated his circuses, especially in the past. Even though grift had been abolished on the Mugivan outfits following the 1922 season Sparks still would not consider any kind of offer from Mugivan and his group. However, the American Circus Corporation did indeed get the Sparks Circus in the late fall of 1929 in a ruse which old troupers have talked about ever since. It was old E.W. Adams' favorite topic.

Sparks had not been in good health for some time and in a letter sent to Roland Butler his head of the press department dated March 27, 1928 he wrote:

"I have not been well all winter. Spent plenty of money with doctors with very little relief. Am feeling much better however and hope to improve right along. It looks like a terrible

Season of 1929

by Joseph T. Bradbury

season and am very much discouraged about the outlook but it may not be as bad as it looks. I know your heart and soul has always been with me and the Sparks Show and am sure you will more than do your part for the success of the show."

The 1928 season did turn out to be satisfactory for Sparks and his health did likewise but he was ready to retire, or at least thought so, and was receptive to the offer made to purchase his show in the fall of 1928 from Henry B. Gentry.



Henry B. Gentry, manager, Sparks Circus, Season of 1929. Pfening Archives.

Gentry was as well known to the circus world as was Sparks himself. He was born Nov. 9, 1864, the youngest of 4 brothers, (Frank H., J.W., and Will W., being the others). Henry B. got started with a theater show in the mid 1880's playing opera houses and the like with his trained dogs and ponies. In 1891 the outfit was converted to full circus style operation. Soon all brothers were associated with him and in 1899 they had on the road

a total of four shows, each using four rail cars. The number of shows operated by the Gentrys, all on a dog and pony show format, varied in number through the years but by 1916 they had a single 14 car show. At the conclusion of the 1916 season the show was sold to J.B. Austin and J.D. Newman who continued to use the Gentry title and operated it through the 1922 season. (Tom Parkinson had an outstanding history of the original Gentry Bros. Shows in the Nov.-Dec. 1959 *White Tops*.)

In 1917 Henry B. Gentry became manager of the Sells-Floto Circus, then owned by Fred Bonfils and Harry Tammen. He continued as manager on through the 1918, 1919, and 1920 seasons. Sells-Floto was sold following the 1920 season to Jerry Mugivan, Bert Bowers, and Edward Ballard (who would later organize the American Circus Corporation). In 1921 the new owners replaced Gentry with Zack Terrell as manager. At the time of the Sparks purchase in 1929 Gentry was 65 years old.

The sale of the Sparks show supposedly to Henry B. Gentry was made in November and the Dec. 1, 1928 *Billboard* proclaimed with large headlines that "SPARKS SOLD TO H.B. GENTRY."

Soon it was learned that Gentry had been acting as an agent for the American Circus Corporation and this news, tradition has always claimed, upset Charles Sparks greatly. The late E.W. Adams personally told the author that Sparks cried like a baby when he learned that Mugivan now owned his show. Adams said that Sparks was furious at Gentry and told him, "You old scoundrel, if you weren't so old I'd take this cane and bash your head in," he reportedly stated.

The local newspapers in Macon reported the sale of the show to Gentry and at the time they also were unaware of the true events taking place.

The above mentioned documents in the Circus World Museum files tell the story of the transfer of Sparks Circus to Gentry and then to the American Circus Corporation which is summarized as follows:

THE SPARKS CIRCUS COMPANY (INDIANA)

This company was organized under



the laws of the State of Indiana on December 4, 1928, with an authorized capital of 1,000 shares of no par value common stock. It was formed for the purpose of acquiring all of the property, titles and goodwill of the Sparks Circus. The events leading up to this transaction were as follows:

An option dated November 13, 1928, executed between Charles Sparks, Clifton R. Sparks, both of Bibb County, Georgia, Mrs. Nan Weisman of East Brady, Pennsylvania, and H.B. Gentry, and a later bill of sale dated November 22, 1928, provided for the sale and transfer to H.B. Gentry of all the property, titles, goodwill, etc. of Sparks Circus for the sum of \$206,200.00. Under date of November 27, 1928, H.B. Gentry executed an assignment whereby he transferred all his interest in the said Sparks Circus to Jerry Mugivan who acted as nominee for the American Circus Corporation. In turn, Jerry Mugivan, by a bill of sale dated January 1, 1929 transferred these assets to The Sparks Circus Company of Indiana.

At a meeting of the Board of Directors of the American Circus Corporation held on November 17, 1928, Jerry Mugivan, as president was authorized to borrow \$250,000.00 from Charles Edward Ballard and to execute a one year note for the purpose of financing the purchase of the Sparks Circus for account of American Circus Corporation. On January 1, 1929 American Circus Corporation transferred to Circus City Zoological Gardens, Inc., all

Sparks Circus personnel on the lot at Bayside, N.Y., June 5, 1929. Some are in costume for the spec, Lily of the Nile. In background are the Dancing Girls (left) and Dolphin tableau wagons newly painted white for the 1929 season. Photo by E.J. Kelty (Don Marcks Collection).

of its assets, including the assets of Sparks Circus and the note for \$250,000.00. As of January 1, 1929, Circus City Zoological Gardens, Inc. sold to The Sparks Circus Company (Indiana) the assets, titles and goodwill of the Sparks Circus for the sum of \$190,000.00.

Opening entries appearing on the books of The Sparks Circus Company (Indiana) as of December 31, 1928 were as follows:

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| To Cash | \$ 60,000.00 |
| To Inventory | 190,000.00 |
| By Capital stock | \$250,000.00 |

The entire authorized capital stock of the company was subscribed for and paid by Circus City Zoological Gardens Inc. on January 1, 1929 at \$250.00 per share, or a total of \$250,000.00.

The stock certificate book of the corporation shows the certificates issued as follows:

| Certificate No. | Date of Issue | In Name of | No. of Shares |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| 4 | Jan. 1, 1929 | Circus City Zoological Gardens, Inc. | 997 |
| 5 | Jan. 1, 1929 | Jerry Mugivan | 1 |
| 6 | Jan. 1, 1929 | Bert Bowers | 1 |

7 Jan. 1, 1929 Perry McCart 1
1,000

Certificates Nos. 1, 2 and 3, for one share each, issued to the three incorporators were cancelled and certificates Nos. 5, 6 and 7 thereafter issued as above.

Henry B. Gentry was named as manager of the show for the 1929 season by the owners. No doubt this was part of the original deal made between Mugivan and Gentry for the latter to act as agent in the Sparks purchase. Named to be assistant manager was Sam B. Dill who had been in the Mugivan organization for a number of years. Dill had been manager of the John Robinson Circus in 1927 (one of the American Circus Corporation shows) but he was replaced in 1928 by Louis Chase. During 1928 Dill served as assistant to manager Dam Odom of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. For whatever the reason the placing of Dill as an assistant to Gentry didn't work out well as we shall soon see.

In early January 1929 the American Circus Corporation bought its second major circus during a six week period when it purchased the 30 car Al G. Barnes Circus from Al G. himself. Thus for 1929 the ACC fielded a total of 5 railroad circuses, or one more than its previous high for a single season. In 1921 and 1922 Mugivan and company had put out four shows but from 1923 through 1928 had operated only three.

The ACC shows and their managers in 1929 were as follows:

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Sells-Floto | 30 cars (later enlarged to 40) | Zack Terrell |
| Hagenbeck-Wallace | 30 cars | Dan Odum |
| Al G. Barnes | 30 cars | S.L. Cronin |
| John Robinson | 25 cars | Jess Adkins |
| Sparks | 20 cars | H.B. Gentry |

Although Sparks was the smallest in number of rail cars of any of the ACC units the owners were still enthusiastic over the acquisition and held high hopes for its future. The late Edward Ballard has been quoted that the 20 car Sparks Circus at the time of its purchase was the most valuable piece of circus property in the country.

Two important decisions were immediately made by Mugivan and his partners and passed on to Gentry who had taken up residence in Macon as the new manager of the Sparks show. First, the show would remain basically the same size as in 1928 but some improvements would be made to the physical properties. Second, the street parade, long a popular Sparks tradition, would be retained. Even though the last ACC parades had been given in 1925 it was felt the daily march by the Sparks show was too valuable to discard.

The 1929 train would move on 20 cars (same number and type as the previous season) consisting of 1 advance, 5 stocks, 9 flats, and 5 coaches. The flats and stocks had been built by Mt. Vernon.

Unfortunately there is not as much data available regarding the physical properties, animals, etc. in 1929 as there are for 1928; however, there should have been very little change between the two seasons.

For example, major tents in 1928 consisted of the big top, 140 ft. round with three 50's; menagerie, 70 ft. round with three 40's; and side show, 60 ft. round with two 30's. In all probability the same size tents would have been used in 1929. Likewise the animal list shouldn't vary much which in 1928 had 90 head baggage stock, 54 head ring stock, including 4 rosinbacks, 16 ponies, 9 elephants, 5 camels, 4 zebras, 2 ostriches, and 3 llamas. The show had a total of 12 cages. Nine were 12 ft. long and three were 16 ft. On two of the longer cages were corner statues and the third had panel carvings where originally statues had been. In 1928 there were 42 baggage wagons and 2 Mack Trucks. This number probably didn't change in 1929.

Change Reynolds, well known CHS member, and prominent elephant historian has very kindly furnished us with a list of the 9 elephants in the 1929 herd and interesting facts about each one.

The nine elephants were as follows: Sparks Queen (renamed Tillie in 1932 when on Ringling-Barnum), Topsy,

Newspaper ad for Sparks Circus stand at Pulaski, Va., April 17, 1929. Pfening Archives.

Myrtle, Bonnie (sometimes spelled Bunnie), Sparks Babe, Sparks Mary, Alice, Barnum Queen, and Julie.

Reynolds also tells the following:

Barnum Queen. This elephant has a most interesting history in that she was imported for the Barnum show at an unknown date. She served with the Barnum & Bailey Circus during the early years of this century and was included with the transfer to Ringling-Barnum Combined Shows at the end of the 1918 season. In 1921 she, with Mary and Jess of the Barnum herd were sold, along with Vanita of the Ringling herd, to Hagenbeck in Germany. There was an elephant named Queen on the Barnum Show as early as 1881. She squeezed Harry Packard against a wagon in 1883 and he later died in the hospital from this injury. Since Barnum Queen of the Sparks Circus was an old elephant in the 1930's the age would have been approximately correct for the Sparks animal to have been this original Barnum Show Queen. However, I lack information for the 1890's to place her on the Barnum & Bailey Circus of this century—until 1918. Probably was the same animal.

Anyway, Barnum Queen was resold to the Sparks Circus in 1922 by Hagenbeck, and was a member of the elephant herd on that show until Ringling-Barnum added the Sparks ele-

phants to their show, following Sparks' close in 1931.

Sparks' Queen (later Little Tille). This elephant was on the J. Augustus Jones' Show as early as 1912 according to Bill Woodcock. She became a member of the Sparks elephant herd in 1913 and remained with that show until the transfer to Ringling-Barnum in 1932. Ted Gallup said that her name was changed to Tillie on Ringling-Barnum probably to distinguish her from Barnum Queen. However, another bull named Tillie was soon added to the herd. This one was known as Big Tillie and had originated with the Corporation shows. Thus, on the Sparks' herd there were two elephants named Queen—Sparks Queen and Barnum Queen.

Topsy. This elephant also came from the J. Augustus Jones Show to the Sparks Circus in 1913 and remained on that show until its animals and properties were absorbed into the Ringling-Barnum concern. Benedict's study in 1935 indicated that Topsy was 7 ft. 8 inches tall; 6680 lbs., 53 years old.

Myrtle. She was purchased from J. Augustus Jones in 1918 and was with Sparks until absorbed into the Ringling-Barnum herd in 1932. In 1935 Benedict listed her age as 55 years; height 8 ft. and weight 8920, a big elephant.

Bonnie (Bunnie). She was also purchased from J. Augustus Jones in 1918 and was with Sparks until combined with Ringling-Barnum in 1932. In 1935 Benedict listed her as 38 years old; 8 ft. 10 inches tall; weight, 6375 lbs.

Sparks Babe. This was the third elephant purchased from J. Augustus Jones in 1918. She followed the same route as Myrtle and Bonnie to the Ringling-Barnum herd in 1932.

The above were the six large elephants on the Sparks Circus in 1929. Sparks Mary, Alice, and Julie were baby elephants in the herd. All of the nine Sparks elephants were Asiatic females.

Correspondence between Manager Henry B. Gentry and his big boss, Jerry Mugivan is most interesting. It appears that Mugivan handled many of the tasks of putting together the performance as well as the hiring of other personnel while the individual show manager's primary job was to renovate the equipment for the new season and of course was in direct charge of all of the winterquarters activities. It appears that Gentry gave assistant manager Sam Dill too much authority to make purchases. He ran up large accounts, and got in trouble with Mugivan about it. Gentry himself no doubt was the cause of much of the heavy expense of the Macon quarters during the winter of 1928-29. He or-

dered a new paint scheme for most of the parade wagons which will be mentioned shortly and in all probability also gave the train new colors. For some unexplained reason photos of the 1929 Sparks train do not exist while those of earlier seasons are plentiful. In 1928 stocks and flats were painted orange with white lettering and coaches red with white. Some observers of the show in 1929 have said the flats and stocks were yellow and while one man's "orange" may be another's "yellow" and there is good cause to believe they were painted a bright yellow in 1929. Photos in 1930 definitely picture stocks with a light background and title in a darker color (probably red). Hopefully, some reader will supply us with postively identified 1929 photos of the train cars which will either show them to have retained their 1928 color scheme or gone to that used in 1930. Regardless, Gentry and his assistant Dill spent a lot of money getting the show ready for the road. A letter from Mugivan to Gentry dated March 25, 1929 reads as follows:

"We are depositing today to your credit here \$10,000 and are making a note against your company for like amount.

"If you had taken the show out as it was, you wouldn't have needed that money, but you let Sam (Dill) run wild and spend the money, so I do not see where we have got a chance. See if you can't get out with the \$10,000 and you can pay some of those local bills from the road."

"I would find some place there to store all your surplus machinery and equipment—you could start putting away such stuff as seats now."

A letter dated January 22, 1929 from Gentry to Mugivan, in addition to discussing an act for the performance, also gives indication that new stringers for seating were coming to the show, possibly surplus on hand at the Peru, Indiana quarters where Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, and John Robinson were spending the winter. The letter reads as follows:

"Dear Mr. Mugivan:

"Just have your letter, wire rather, about the Guices. I have wired them accepting them at \$400.00 for the bar act, comedy act and two ladies principle riders. Have asked him who the riders are.

"About the stringers being longer. That will be alright we can load them. You have the train book we sent you.

Very truly yours,

THE SPARKS CIRCUS CO.

By (signed) Henry B. Gentry"

Evidently Mugivan sent more instructions regarding the Guice act which prompted this letter from Gentry to Mugivan dated Jan. 23, 1929.

"Dear Mr. Mugivan:

"I have your letter of the 21st. inst.,



Sparks baggage wagons at Central City Park, Macon, Ga. winterquarters, early spring 1929. At top left is portion of the ring barn. Photo by E.W. Adams (Joe Bradbury Collection).

with the enclosure of the Guice correspondence. Guice has accepted the proposition of \$250.00 for his bar act. I contracted Willie Green today and will send him to New York to meet Barry. Wish you would write Barry to assist him in any way he can. Regarding John Helliott for the lion act. I am

Sparks Circus Magazine and Daily Review for the 1929 season was in rotogravure and featured on the front cover portraits of Charles, John H., and Clifton Sparks. Pfening Archives.

Magazine and Daily Review

dickering with LaVerne Hauser to work the lions and have a contract out to her now. Franz [Woska] thinks she can do the work. I have not heard any more from Ione Carl except the clipping that was mailed from Peru.

"Regarding the stock certificates and etc. Beg to advise that they were mailed to Roy to sign on the same day they were received here. Suppose you have them by this time.

"Note what you say about advising Nelson about the wardrobe and advise that I have written him about it.

"Letter from Fred Dion is returned. Don't think we would want him.

"Your letter of the 18th states that you are mailing a list of the Barnes animals. It was not enclosed. We mailed six copies of our list to the Barnes Show and mailed you one list.

"Enclosed you will find two diagrams of the No. 7 car. Which one would you advise?" Signed—Henry B. Gentry.

The next to last sentence indicates that Mugivan had the Al G. Barnes and Sparks shows exchanging lists of their animals for possible exchange of some between the shows. Last sentence no doubt refers to remodeling work done on rail car No. 7, probably a sleeper. Another indication that Gentry was spending money in Macon.

On Feb. 14, 1929 Gentry wrote the following to Mugivan.

"Dear Mr. Mugivan:

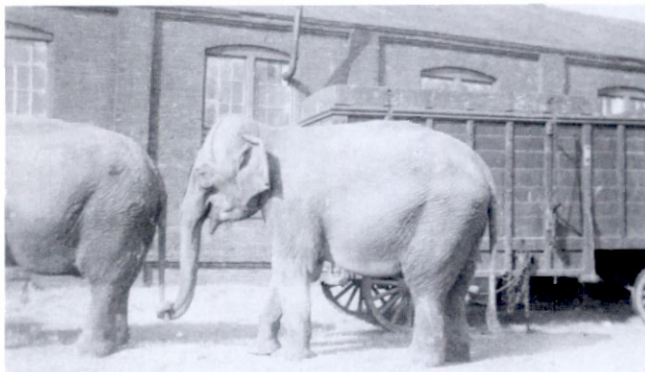
"One of the larger female tigers died this a.m. Had bone in the intestine. Franz [Woska] says she has never been right for some time. I am sending hide today to Logansport Robe and Tanning Co. with instructions to tan and send to you. Please write them how you want it finished.

"Up to noon today Singleton hasn't showed up." Signed H.B. Gentry.

Mugivan replied to this letter on February 16.

"Dear Mr. Gentry:

"Sorry to learn that you lost the



Sparks elephants and baggage wagon at Central City Park, Macon, Ga. winterquarters, early spring 1929. In rear is the principal building which housed the show's woodworking, blacksmith, and paint shops. Photo by E.W. Adams (Joe Bradbury Collection.)

tiger and if you want either a big Siberian Tiger or a nice one about 3 years old, we have these two here to spare.

"About Singleton—he told me he was leaving and I asked him if he was going to Macon or Havre De Grace [quarters of Downie Bros. Circus. Report was out that Charles Sparks had just purchased that show from Andrew Downie] and he just laughed.

"Charles Young is here in Peru in case you need him, and Singleton does not show up. He isn't much of a mechanic but a good boss canvasman.

"Everything here moving along okay. With best wishes, I am." Signed Jerry Mugivan.

The *Billboard* as was customary kept the circus world informed of the Sparks show activities during the early winter months and spring of 1929. The Jan. 19, 1929 *Billboard* said that Harry Mack was again contracting and press agent for Sparks, making this his 8th season with the show. Another note said that George and Alice Sohn, baritone and prima donna respectively were to be back with Sparks for their 4th season. The Sohns were currently working for Irons and Clamage at the Gayety Theater in Detroit.

The Feb. 9, 1929 *Billboard* broke an interesting story in that Charles Sparks had purchased Downie Bros. Circus, the largest motorized show on the road, from Andrew Downie. The article noted that Mr. Sparks had been a showman of long standing, operating the Sparks Circus for many years until the latter part of last season when he disposed of it to H.B. Gentry.

In only a few weeks Sparks sold Downie Bros. back to Andrew Downie. This was the first of three separate purchases of Downie Bros. supposedly by Sparks which took place over the

next 18 months. Twice he sold it back to its original owner but finally in the late summer of 1930 he bought and kept the show, operating it on through the 1938 season.

The Feb. 16, 1929 *Billboard* reported that Charles Berry would direct the Sparks Circus program during the coming season. Berry, equestrian director with the Al G. Barnes and Hagenbeck-Wallace circuses was returning to the white tops after a year's absence. He was to be equestrian director with Sparks, having signed contracts with H.B. Gentry for the coming season. He left Montgomery for Macon on February 4 where he will assume his new duties. Berry will also work the big horse act and assist in the staging of the spectacle. A final item said that the original Nelson Family will be one of the features of the Sparks program. In a separate *Billboard* article it was mentioned that Mable Stark would go to Peru, Ind. to join Sells-Floto for 1929. She worked 16 tigers last season with John Robinson.

The same Feb. 16 issue also had a full write-up of activities in Macon. Charles Berry had arrived in quarters and he and Jack Casteel are at present engaged in breaking a number of greyhounds and collies. Charles Katz, former manager of the Sparks pit show is in town getting the Florida Blossoms (minstrel show) ready for the opening. He will be assisted by William Morgan, formerly of the Sparks ticket wagon.

The March 2, 1929 *Billboard* advised that Andrew Downie had bought his show back from Charles Sparks. Bobby Worth, supt. of privileges with Sparks is now in Macon, and George Singleton, supt. of canvas arrived in quarters last week and started his crew of men to work. (Evidently Singleton had been riding a fence wondering if Charlie Sparks was actually going back into circus business and he would join him, but now since it was official Mr. Sparks would have no show, Singleton returned to Macon where he would serve as superintendent and boss canvasman for the coming season.)



Sparks baggage stock at Central City Park, Macon, Ga. winterquarters, early spring 1929. Photo by E.W. Adams (Joe Bradbury Collection).

An informative article concerning Sparks activities in Macon came in the March 16, 1929 *Billboard*. The story said that all departments of the quarters are busy. The parade wagons have been finished in white and gold. The ring stock under Harry Phillips and the baggage stock looked after by Jake Posey are in fine condition. Manager H.B. Gentry and Sam B. Dill, assistant, are on the job. Mr. and Mrs. Joe Lewis have arrived and are rehearsing and Charles Berry, equestrian director is breaking a novel animal act. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Guice with their stock and riggings and Brady Blackwell, assistant boss on the big top, were late arrivals, also Charles Fortune and Sig Bonhomme, who motored from Woodlawn, Texas. Jack Hoyt, bandmaster, who has been in Virginia with indoor circuses, will arrive March 15. Carlos and Etta Carreon are here with their high-school and jumping horses, also Lorraine Casteel. Walter McClain has his troupe of elephants ready and has for assistants, Ethel Lewis, Ruby Hoyt, and Polly Watkins. Another note in the same issue said that Ben Fink will be a special agent ahead for Sparks. For the last 7 years he has been business manager of Lasses White Minstrels. A final Sparks item in the March 16 issue was this advertisement.

"SPARKS CIRCUS WANTS. Single and Double Iron-Jaw Acts, Lady Menage Riders. Experienced Timekeeper. Press Agent Back With Show. Address Sparks Circus, Macon, Ga."

The following week the *Billboard* published its annual section of circus rosters. Three of the American Circus Corporation units, Al G. Barnes, Hagenbeck-Wallace, and Sells-Floto were included giving the names of the staff, department heads, and key personnel, however neither Sparks nor John Robinson were on the roster.

The March 30, 1929 *Billboard* had another detailed report from the



Sparks Circus herd of nine elephants on the lot, season of 1929. Elephant dept. supt., Walter McClain is at far right. Photo by E.W. Adams (Joe Bradbury Collection).

it would be a profitable one. The nation's economy during the Coolidge years in the White House had generally been good and most shows had prospered. The presidential election in November 1928 had given the nation Herbert Hoover and he was now in office by the time the new 1929 circus season began. The 1928 season had been pretty good for most shows and for those who found the going rough, the weak take could be blamed mainly on the weather and factors other than the economy. Railroad circuses, flat car type, hitting the road for the season included Ringling-Barnum, 90 cars; Sells-Floto, 30 cars (later enlarged to 40); Hagenbeck-Wallace, 30 cars; Al G. Barnes, 30 cars; Robbins Bros., 30 cars; John Robinson, 25 cars; Sparks, 20 cars; Christy Bros., 20 cars; Gentry Bros., 15 cars; and Cole Bros., 10 cars. Two flat car type wild west shows were also out: Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show, 30 cars, and the new Buck Jones Wild West on 15 cars. E.H. Jones again had his 3 car, gilly type, Cole & Rogers, on the road.

Overland shows going out included Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Schell Bros., Seils-Sterling, Hunt's, Russell Bros., Silvan-Drew; Vanderburg Bros. Honest Bill-Moon Bros., Orton Bros., Brison Bros., Ketrow Bros., Dorsey Bros., and a number of other small outfits. Both Downie Bros. and Barnett Bros. were fairly large fully motorized shows, and there were several smaller outfits which now were one hundred percent truck equipped, but quite a few shows, some fairly large such as Mighty Haag still moved with a combination of wagons and motorized vehicles.

Railroad shows parading in 1929 were Robbins Bros., Christy Bros., Sparks, Gentry Bros., Cole Bros., Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West, and the new Buck Jones Wild West also gave some parades. Most of the larger overland shows paraded.

Opening date for Sparks was set for Saturday, April 13, in Winston-Salem, N.C. This was the first time since wintering in Macon the show did not open its new season in its winterquarters town. The reason the show opted not to open in Macon but make a 470 mile run over the Southern R.R. to

Winston-Salem for its initial stand is not known to the author. The late Jake Posey, in charge of the Sparks baggage stock in 1929, records a story in his book, *Last of the Forty Horse Drivers*, which so far as I know has never been told elsewhere. Jake mentions that Charlie Sparks told him as the train finished loading at Macon to come by his room in the downtown Dempsey Hotel and get his trunk and put it on the train. According to Jake's tale Sparks said he was buying the show back from the new owners and would again be head of Sparks Circus. However, when they got to Winston-Salem Sparks informed Posey that the deal was off. They had doubled the price on him and he wouldn't buy. Possibly, Sparks did attempt to get his show back, but in any event, old Jake was the only one to ever tell about it in print.

The April 27, 1929 *Billboard* covered the opening of the Sparks Circus with an article headlined, "NEW FEATURES IN SPARKS SHOW. Opens at Winston-Salem, N.C. and Presents 19 Displays."

"Winston-Salem, N.C. April 20 — For the first time in many years Sparks Circus opened away from winterquarters at Macon, Ga. This season the trains moved northward to Winston-Salem for the opening stand last Saturday. The performance moves smoothly and swiftly and reflects the untiring efforts of those who have been placed in charge. The first performance, always somewhat rough, looked as though the show had been on tour several days. This season's performance retains several of last year's features, also many new and novel features. The program opens with a colorful spec, resplendent with gorgeous beautiful Oriental costumes. All performers take part. Alice and George Sohn, leading characters, and their magnificent voices have never been better.

"Display 2—Football horses, in rings one and three, presented by Carlos Carreon and James Sanders, drew many laughs and much applause.

"Display 3—In the arena, leopards presented by Harriet Guilfoyle, thrilled spectators with her superb training and fearlessness. In the rings, dogs worked by Jack Casteel and James Sanders.

"Display 4—Ring 1, the Arnesen Duo, comedy acrobats; ring 3, the Spaulding trio, comedy acrobats.

"Display 5—In the arena, Franz Woska puts the black-maned African lions through their routine with skill and ease. In the rings pigs presented by Charles Barry and ponies by Jack Casteel.

"Display 6—Ladies' principal riding act; ring 1, Babe Feaster; ring 2, Florence Guice.

"Display 7—Swinging ladders with Misses Foster, Hoyt, Bonhomme, Watkins, Nelson, Herrington, Leonard, Lewis, Miller, Scaggs, Wilks, Hill, and Loescher.

"Display 8—In the arena, Bengal tigers, presented by Franz Woska; the acme of perfection in the art of subjugating jungle beasts. Superbly presented.

"Display 9—Liberty horses in the rings presented by Carlos Carreon and Charles Barry. They present a most colorful picture. Excellently trained.

"Display 10—In the center ring Miss Rosina, queen of the wire.

"Display 11—Elephants in all rings worked by Ruby Hoyt, Ethel Lewis and Polly Watkins. Walter McLain training efforts are reflected in the perfectly trained manner in which the "bulls" worked.

"Display 12—In the center ring the Riding Guices in their comedy riding act. A wonderful display of magnificent riding.

"Display 13—Ring 1, dogs worked by Lorraine Casteel; center ring, Capt. Firth's Seals, balancing balls, walking tight ropes and playing instruments won these animals much applause; ring 3, dogs worked by Della Bonhomme.

"Display 14—Iron jaw. Ring 1, Ray Glaum; center ring, the Wright Duo in a daring novel ladder balancing act; ring 3, iron jaw, Miss York.

"Display 15—The Nelson Family, presenting one of the most thrilling and daring acrobatic acts ever presented under canvas.

"Display 16—Menage act. Dancing and high-jumping horses.

"Display 17—The Flying Walters. On a lofty perch in midair they present a most thrilling and daring act.

"Display 18—Old English steeplechase.

"Display 19—Making of the Flag. A historical pageant depicting the birth of the Stars and Stripes.

"Paul Wenzell, producing clown, has created some new and original walk arounds and numbers. He has not permitted a dull moment from the

first entry until the close of the program. Wenzell has assembled in clown alley Herbert Schnider, Sammy Bennett, Harvey Spalding, Stanley White, Teddy Marchant, Charles Fortune; Arnesens, comedy acrobats; Pewee, acrobatic clown; Rube Stone, rube clown; Joe Lewis, clown cop; Harry Feaster and Sig Bonhomme.

"Charles Barry, equestrian director, deserves no little commendation for the efficient and able manner in which he has arranged and presented the program.

"Jack Hoyt has the band, which includes Ira Haines, Martin Stodghill, Joe Ballard, cornets; Ed Sturgis, Bert Keller, V. Brown, clarinets; Bert Proctor, J.T. Koyle, horns; R. De Carlo, C. Nathan Babcock, baritones; Jack Slickting, W.F. Moore, trombones; Knute Ohlson, E.J. Peterson, basses; Del Hoyt, bass drum; Doc Harris, snare drum; air calliope, R. Louis Sanderson.

"Many old department bosses have been retained. Among them are George Singleton; Jack Posey, boss hostler; Harry Phillips, supt. ring stock; Whitey Lehrter, boss property man; Walter McClain, supt. of elephants; Java Koen, chief electrician; George York, boss canvasman side show; George Quinlan, head usher; Benny Sturges, trainmaster. George V. Connors again has the side show and Carlos Carreon has the Wild West.

"The staff: H.B. Gentry, manager with Sam B. Dill, assistant; John C. Kelly, legal adjuster; H.H. Sicks, secretary and treasurer; Fred Hutchinson, supt. front door; Charles Barry, equestrian director; Fred Smythe, supt. of tickets; T.W. Ballenger, general agent; Charles Underwood, press agent; Frank Burns, manager advertising car No. 1, with Harry Mack, contracting the press; Bruck Chesterman, press story man; Mike Pyne, special agent."

Following the opening in Winston-Salem the show moved on a Sunday run into Virginia with initial stand at Lynchburg which was followed by Roanoke, Pulaski, and Bristol. The final two dates of the first week were in Tennessee at Johnson City and Kingsport. Another Sunday run of 132 miles moved the show out of Tennessee and into West Virginia with stands at Bluefield, Gary, and Williamson, then it was into Ohio for a single date at Portsmouth and this was followed by one day in Kentucky at Ashland, then it was back into West Virginia at Logan, April 27, to be followed by 7 additional dates in the state. Next on the route was Pennsylvania which saw the Sparks show playing Connellsville, Greensburg, Indiana, Vandergrift, Charleroi, Uniontown, and Somerset.

The first of many personnel changes of the show came in May when Mr.



Sparks Circus air calliope on the lot, season of 1929. The wagon was painted white for this season. Joe Bradbury Collection.

and Mrs. Jack Casteel closed and headed for California where they were to go into business. An advertisement in the May 18, 1929 *Billboard* indicated there had been a change in the bandmaster with C.L. Brown replacing Jack Hoyt. The ad read as follows: "WANTED UNION CIRCUS MUSICIANS. All instruments. Write, Don't Wire, C.L. Brown, Sparks Circus, as per route."

The May 25, 1929 *Billboard* said that the Sparks band is now strictly union with C.L. Brown as bandmaster. The article also noted that Mr. and Mrs. William DeBarry have left the sideshow to play the Pantages Time (Vaudeville). Mr. and Mrs. William Krieger have replaced them. A final note said that H.A. (Whitey) Lehrter had also left Sparks. Whether or not any pressure from the musicians union caused the show to go to a union band or not was not explained. In all probability the other American Circus Corporation units had union bands while Sparks in the past did not.

It was not until the May 25, 1929 *Billboard* that the trade publication had any news of weather or business conditions on the show so far in the season. The article reported that Sparks had encountered inclement weather since its opening at Winston-Salem, N.C. on April 13. Performances at Lynchburg and Roanoke were given in a sea of mud. At Pulaski a snow flurry lasted the greater part of the day. At Parkersburg, W.Va., May 2, a near cyclone blew down the side show just as the doors for the afternoon performance were opened. Fairmont, W. Va., always a Monday stand was booked for Saturday, May 4. The lot contracted was the usual

one on the old fairgrounds, which was impossible to use. A several-mile haul made it impossible to use this ground except on Monday. Assistant Manager Sam B. Dill saved the day and he is to be congratulated in getting two shows in to a good business despite a downpour. Dill got in touch with his old friend, Judge Harry Shaw, president of the school board. He gave a permit for the show to use the high-school grounds, an ideal spot for a circus lot. Additional news in the article said that the Nelson Family is getting a large hand at each performance. Rosina Nelson is scoring with her wire act, especially the dance numbers. Franz Woska and his Bengal tigers are receiving much applause. Charlie Barry has rounded out a two-hour program that moves at a rapid pace.

Sparks wasn't the only show that was hurt during the bad weather early in the season. It was unseasonably cold and very wet in many parts of the country during the spring of 1929.

It had been evident all along from the file of letters between Gentry and Mugivan that Gentry and his assistant, Sam B. Dill, were not getting along together well. In this interesting letter dated May 13, 1929 which Gentry wrote to Mugivan some of his problems with Dill are noted. It read as follows:

"Dear Mr. Mugivan,

"Dill must be losing his mind. Yesterday afternoon and night (Sunday) he furnished Joe Kennedy whiskey to sell. Understand he got good business. I was talking today to Kennedy. He is sore and wants to leave. He said Sam (Dill) made him the goat. I don't know where he got the whiskey. It might be what he had in the large mineral water bottles. He has been drinking heavy for last week, in fact he has been drinking some all spring and part of time in Macon. Saw him talking to a bootlegger this afternoon.

I hate to bother you with these kind of letters. Was talking to Bobby Worth. He said Sam must be losing his mind. Shall I keep on reporting. Signed. H.B. Gentry."

To this letter Mugivan replied as follows:

"Dear friend Henry:

"Yours of the 13th acknowledged. Yes—keep me posted as to your condition and if you get too bad, I will come on and relieve you.

"With best wishes, I am. Signed—Jerry Mugivan."

The files contain no more letters of this nature but within a few weeks Dill would be leaving the Sparks show.

Continuing the route, following Somerset, the show dipped into Maryland to play Cumberland, Hagerstown, Westminster, and Annapolis, then returned to Pennsylvania at Chester, May 20, and finished the remainder of the sixth week in the Keystone State with stands at Norristown, Bethlehem, Mt. Carmel, Hazleton, and Honesdale.

The seventh week saw the show in New Jersey with dates at Montclair, and Englewood, then came a one day visit into New York at Newburgh, then it was back to Jersey for Westwood and Westfield. June 1, the final day of the week, found Sparks at Stapleton, Staten Island, New York.

The June 9, 1929 *Billboard* had an article headlined SPARKS PLAYING TO GOOD BUSINESS which said the show's first stand in New Jersey at Montclair produced a capacity matinee and good night house. Business has been excellent of late despite inclement weather. The program is peppy and moved with precision under the direction of Charles Barry, who also appears in three numbers. The Nelson Family, numbering seven, are going good as usual, including Rosina, on the tight wire. Walter Guice and company clicked in their comedy riding act, as did the entire company. The Sohns—George and Alice—sing three special written numbers in the spec, and during the swinging ladder numbers.

George Connors, veteran side-show manager, makes the first concert announcement, and Fred Smythe does the program announcing. The Carlos Carreon Wild West, numbering 12, with Joe Lewis clowning, is scoring. The new bandleader is C.L. Brown, who is directing a 16 piece band.

The show still retains the daily parade. Pat Valdo, asst. equestrian director with Ringling-Barnum visited the show and enjoyed the matinee at Montclair. He was accompanied by James Wright and Charles Hutchinson. The article also said that Polly Watkins, who received painful injuries at Uniontown, Pa., May 13, including a fractured shoulder while doing the high jumps, has rejoined, although her shoulder is still in a cast. Ruth Wilkes had her arm broken while rehearsing the elephants. Paul Wenzell and his 11 clowns keep the program enlivened with their antics and walkarounds. Capt. Firth's trained seals are a pleasing novelty. In the Carlos Carreon Wild West are Alice Foster, Susie Butcher, Ethel Lewis, Jim Foster, Harry (Shorty) Butcher, Jim Saunders, Paul Nelson, Carlos and Etta Carreon.

A separate notice in the same issue said that Eddie McMannus has joined the Walter Guice act on the Sparks show.

It was mentioned that C.L. Brown, the new Sparks bandmaster, was putting numbers over in fine style. He was bandmaster on Sells-Floto in 1919-20 when H.B. Gentry managed that show.

The big news of the circus season came in late May when it was announced that Tom Mix, the famous western movie star, had joined Sells-Floto at its engagement in Boston and business was so great the show was enlarged from 30 to 40 cars. In the shuffle of the performance after Mix

Different view of Sparks Circus band, season of 1929. Band leader, Jack Hoyt, is fourth from left on rear row (next to man with no cap). Hoyt also had two brothers in the band. Pfening Archives.



joined, Mabel Stark, noted lady tiger trainer, was made available to other of the American Circus Corporation units. Evidently Mugivan had informed Gentry she would be available to Sparks if he could arrange the deal. This letter dated June 10, 1929 from H.B. Gentry to Mugivan mentions this as well as other matters pertaining to the Sparks payroll. The letter is as follows:

"Dear Mr. Mugivan:

"Sold Rhue the tigers 1050. Have room for wrestling tiger. Offered Miss Stark \$50.00 per week. She refused and said she was going to Peru. She would have to double in a upper for a while and said she wouldn't do that.

"Note what you say about 19 men on Train. Some were late check and some unclaimed wages. Same on props, according to rule No. 8. Regarding ushers we had 6 on payroll and paid 25c per performance for extra ushers and ticket takers.

"Payroll No. 7, ushers, train, etc.

"Sparks 6 ushers. Robinson 20 Barnes 26

"Sparks 18 train Robinson 17 Barnes 18

"On the 18 on our train there were 1 boss, 5 unclaimed and 1 late check. Do not know if the other shows combine regular ushers and extra ushers, nor how many unclaimed they had.

"We are returning the sheets under separate cover.

"York get \$35.00 per week. Will separate his pay from his wife's thereafter. His wife's \$25.00 will be changed on payroll 9.

Signed, H.B. Gentry."

Taking a break in the route for a moment let us examine the printed program Sparks had in 1929. While the show had been under the Charlie Sparks management there was no regularly printed program although at times for special engagements a program was prepared for that particular stand, usually under Shrine or other auspices. On the other hand the American Circus Corporation units had used small 6x9 program booklets with rotogravue type illustrations for a number of years. Such a program, which was distributed free of charge, was prepared for the 1929 Sparks show. It had 24 pages and was printed by Louisville Color Gravue Co. of Louisville, Ky. In it were several pages of national advertising which paid for its cost, as well as a listing of the staff and principal officials and the complete performance. About a dozen photos were used to illustrate the principal acts. The *Billboard* carried only a review of the opening performance although due note was made of the several changes that took place during the season. One omission in the initial review was the title of the opening spectacle. The printed program gives the following on the spec. "A Musical Fantasy of Far Off Egypt, interwoven with songs, dances

and music. LILY OF THE NILE, an extravaganza of rare beauty. A story of the land of the Sphinx. Written and directed by John H. Del Vecchio. Beautifully Gowned—Electrically Lighted. Music by Leo Feist and Jerome H. Remic. Costumes—DeMoulin Bros. & Co. and Machieu & Co. Inc. Electrical Effects—F.M. Koen.

Cast

"Princess Cleo," Lily of the Nile—
Miss Alice Sohn

"Prince Luxor— Mr. George Sohn

"Princess Ismalia—

Laverne Hauser

"Princess Ingenia—

Miss Lillian Hopkins

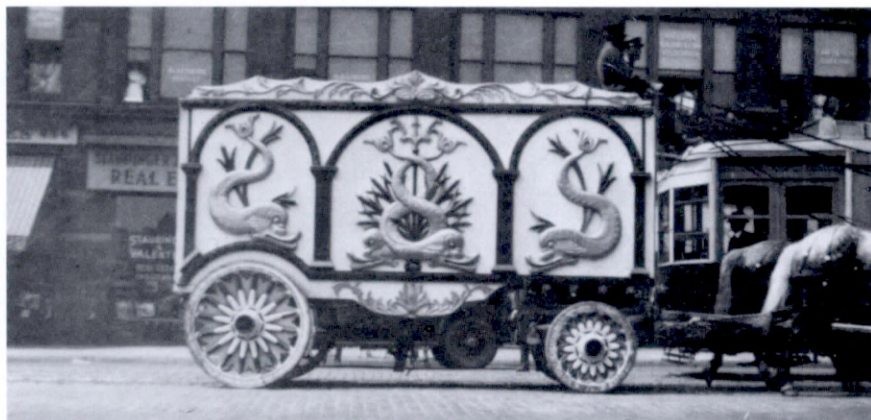
"Court Dancer of Cairo—

Miss Blanche Meyer

"Attendants to the Prince and Princess—Jungle slaves—Sun worshippers—Royal mounted attendants—Dancing Sphinx girls—Native musicians—Daughters of the Nile and their Royal beasts—Riders of the desert sands—Whirlwind Dervish dancers—Royal camel attendants—Wild animals from the Egyptian domains and native torch-bearers. All assembled in this glorious conception of the Land of the Nile."

There are several differences noted in the printed program and that appearing in the *Billboard*. The *Billboard* did not mention Display No. 2 which had a group of Alaskan polar bears in the steel arena worked by John Renwick. Possibly the act just didn't work at the initial performance but did later. Trained polar bears had been in the Sparks program for several years. Also in the printed program LaVerne Hauser is listed as working the group of black maned African lions while the review says that Franz Woska did those honors. Again, possibly Miss Hauser worked the lions at a later date but for the past several seasons Woska had worked both the lion and tiger groups. Woska's specialty was the beautiful number featuring the Bengal tigers.

In researching the 1929 Sparks season for this article perhaps the most valuable tool, especially for details of the spec, performance, and street parade, was a 16 mm movie said to have been taken at Greensburg, Pa., May 8, 1929. The original was owned by the late Gene Christian, well known circus agent who routed the Beers-Barnes Circus during its final years on the road. Mr. Christian very kindly let me make a copy of the movie over 25 years ago. The big top was new, made of snow white canvas which permitted the photographer to take excellent interior views of the spec and various acts in progress. One priceless view shows the spec participants on the track and in the rings while the baritone and prima donna, George and Alice Sohn are on a platform doing their vocal renditions.



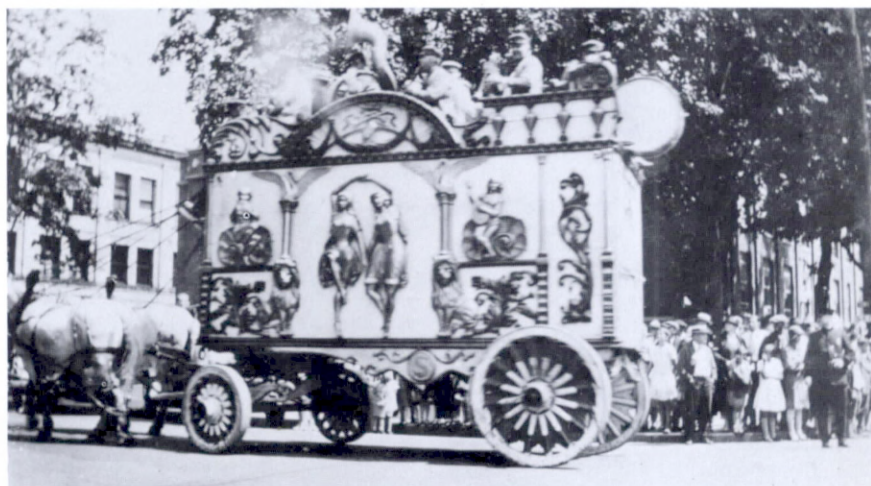
Dolphin Tableau wagon, newly painted white, is pictured here in the Sparks Circus parade, season of 1929. Ordinarily the No. 2 band rode this wagon but for some unknown reason it is not present. Joe Bradbury (Melvin) Collection.

Franz Woska, an excellent trainer and overall menagerie man, who later was in charge of the Ringling-Barnum menagerie, is shown in action putting his tigers through their paces. Woska, an Austrian by birth, with his Teutonic build and bearing and small mustache had a remarkable likeness to the 1933-45 German Fuehrer.

Scenes shot about the sparks lot show new tentage everywhere, another indication that Gentry and his associate, Sam Dill, spent a pile of Mr. Mugivan and his partners' money in getting the show ready for the road.

Finally, the movie gives virtually a complete look at the street parade with evidence all over of the white color scheme so loved by Henry B. Gentry. As can always be expected of vintage parade movies such as this the cameraman runs out of film before the steam calliope at the rear passes by.

Dancing Girls tableau (No. 1 Bandwagon) in Sparks Circus parade at Dunkirk, N.Y., Aug. 5, 1929. Gordon M. Potter Collection in Pfening Archives.



This one is no exception. One change for the better over the previous season is that all cages appear to open. I caught the 1928 Sparks street parade and recall several dens were closed leaving us grammar school kids at the curbside to speculate what kind of varmit was inside the den.

Returning to the route the show moved on Sunday, June 2, from Staten Island, N.Y. over to Long Island, where the eighth week of the season, beginning on Monday, 3rd, found Sparks playing Jackson Heights, Richmond Hill, Bayside, Queens Village, Mineola, and Rockville Center. Then the show moved off Long Island but continued in New York state with dates starting on Monday, June 8, at Poughkeepsie, followed by Troy, Gloversville, Herkimer, Watertown, and Potsdam.

The June 15, 1929 *Billboard* said that while on Long Island many of the Sparks folks went to Coney Island, also that of late the show has seen many visitors including Mr. and Mrs. Clifton Sparks. A further note said that Clifton's minstrel show, Florida Blossoms, was doing well on the road. The following week's *Billboard* continued with the list of many visitors to the Sparks show while it was in the New York City vicinity. Prominent were Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers

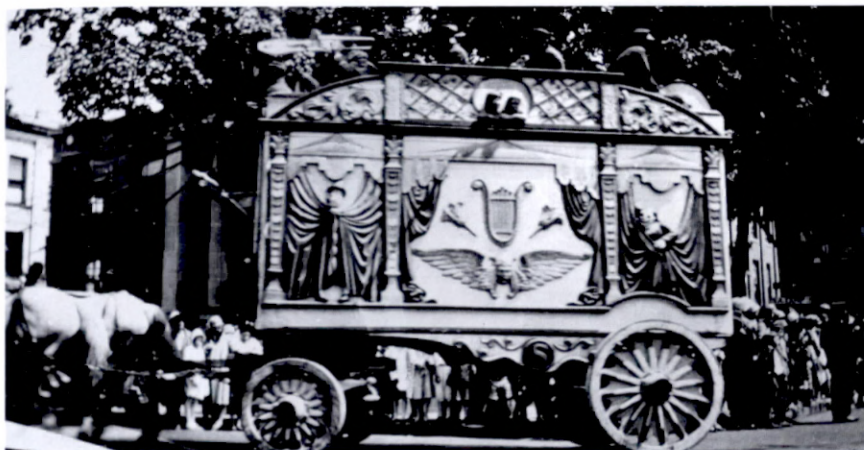
McLain 1924-29

at Stapleton, coming on to see how their newest show under management of Henry B. Gentry was doing. Karl Knudson, general agent, and J.C. Admire, contracting agent, for the Floyd and Howard King owned Gentry Bros. Circus were visitors at Jackson Heights while J.D. Newman, general agent of Sells-Floto dropped in for a visit at the same stand. Another note said that C.L. Brown, the new Sparks bandmaster, received over 200 replies to his recent advertisement for musicians. Brown wanted to thank his many friends for responding. He now had 15 men in his band and was happy to be back on the stand after an absence of 9 years from the white tops.

E.W. Adams, who had been the downtown ticket agent, left the Sparks show at Potsdam, N.Y., June 15, which was the final date in the states before going into Canada for two weeks. Adams returned to his home in Atlanta but shortly thereafter joined the John Robinson Circus which was managed by Jess Adkins as a ticket seller. Adams in his many conversations with the author concerning the 1929 Sparks show was definitely down on the show, criticizing the way it was run, saying it did not treat the public right and was just the opposite in its attitude and business methods than that of Charlie Sparks and his "Sunday School Show." However, Adams really was high on Jess Adkins and the John Robinson Circus which he joined shortly after leaving Sparks. It's difficult to understand why any "non Sunday School" activities would be taking place on Sparks and not John Robinson since both shows would reflect the policies as set down by the top man, Jerry Mugivan. In all probability Adams ran into some sort of personality conflict with Gentry or others on his staff. But in any event his denunciation of the Sparks show was intense. In fact on the route he typed out for me he added in the following notations concerning some of the stands. At Montclair, N.J., May 27, the natives asked, "what has happened to the Sparks show?" in a derogatory manner. At Westfield, N.J., May 31, according to Adams, city officials told the show that it could not play that city again.

On June 16 the show made a Sunday run of 120 miles from Potsdam, N.Y. into Quebec, Canada, where performances were scheduled in Montreal for two days, June 17-18. Next Sparks moved into Ontario for dates at Ottawa, Brockville, Kingston, Oshawa, Peterboro, Smith Falls, and Cornwall. Then there was a return to Quebec for four final dates in the Dominion, Granby, St. Johns, St. Hyacinthe, and Lennoxville.

The June 22, 1929 *Billboard* said that the last week of the show in the states prior to its visit to Canada was



satisfactory. Trainmaster Chuck Connors made the run from Potsdam, N.Y. to Montreal in five hours. Three shows were given at Montreal. In the morning approximately 10,000 children were present. Charles Underwood, press agent, was busy with the staff of *The Gazette News*. Della Bonhomme's dog act is going over big. Other notes said that LaVerne Hausner, who has been on the sick list, is back in the saddle and Ethel Lewis again is in the ring. Dell Hoyt, bass drummer, left for Gloversville, N.Y. to take charge of a minstrel band. Walter Guice is building a new flying net. He has a bar act that never fails to register. Polly Watkins, who was injured in a fall, was called back to the hospital and would rejoin at Kingston, Ontario. Her shoulder cast will be removed. A final item had it that C.L. Brown's concert band is a wow, featuring William G. Merrill in a solo, *Dream Mother*.

The initial stand back in the states was at Gorham, N.H., July 2, which was followed by eight dates in Maine, Lewiston, Augusta, Waterville, Madison, Bangor, Dover-Foxcroft, Houlton, and Caribou. A second visit to Canada came next as Sparks moved into New Brunswick at Edmunston on July 12. The last day of the thirteenth week of the season came the following day at Campbellton. A long Sunday run of 375 miles then took the show into Nova Scotia with the first stand in the province coming at Halifax on July 15. Other dates were at Windsor, Truro, New Glasgow, two days in Sydney, and Amherst, July 22, which was the last stand in Nova Scotia. It was then back into New Brunswick for Newcastle, Moncton, St. John, and Fredericton, which was the final date in Canada during the 1929 season. The show moved back into the states at Calais, Maine on July 27, the last day of the fifteenth week.

The sixteenth week began with two more stands in Maine, Rockland, and Portland, then a single day in New Hampshire, July 31, at Rochester, and

Stage Curtain Tableau (Sideshow bandwagon) in Sparks Circus parade at Dunkirk, N.Y., Aug. 5, 1929. Photo by Frank A. Norton in Pfening Archives.

three in Massachusetts, Gardner, Greenfield, and North Adams.

Little or nothing about the show appeared in the *Billboard* over these few weeks. The July 20, 1929 *Billboard* did tell of the big animal fight which took place at Madison, Maine on July 6. The article said that the Sparks menagerie was thrown into a panic during the afternoon performance when a tiger worked the door loose in its cage and entered the compartment where there was a group of leopards. As a result 10 tigers and 7 leopards got into a fight that waxed hot and furious. Walter McLain, menagerie superintendent, and keepers stuck manfully to their jobs and after a hard battle succeeded in getting them apart and back into their respective cages. Two leopards and one tiger were killed.

Considerable personnel changes took place shortly after the return from Canada. At Portland, Maine, George and Alice Sohn, who were featured in the spec, left to return to vaudeville. Fred Smythe, head ticket seller, also departed, as did Charles Underwood, press representative back. The latter was replaced by J.E. Kirwin, formerly with the Buck Jones Wild West Show.

While the trade publications don't have much news of the Sparks tour of New England in 1929 we are fortunate to have the notes made by the late Isaac Marcks who caught the show at North Adams, Mass., on August 3. Marcks was an early day circus fan and really one of the first to record data of the show's physical equipment, personnel, and other facts. His son, Don Marcks, well known founder and editor of *Circus Report*, has very kindly made copies of his father's original notes available to us for this article.

These notes read as follows:



Horse and Jockey Tableau (clown bandwagon) in Sparks Circus parade at Dunkirk, N.Y., Aug. 5, 1929. Photo by F.A. Norton in Pfening Archives.

"We had to get into North Adams, Mass. pretty early on Aug. 3, 1929, for the show train was scheduled to get in almost before dawn. Guess we had 15 minutes to spare when the Sparks Circus arrived on its one train of 9 flat cars, 5 coaches, and 5 stock cars, carrying 35 wagons. [Note one car was in advance, leaving 19 in the train].

"The wagons were red, the stock cars and flat cars yellow, and the coaches red.

"Wagons on the show were: ticket office, reserved seats, 2 light plants, stake and chain, poles, jacks, stringers, seat planks, cages, 3 cookhouse, blacksmith, horse tents, trunks, sideshow, 2 canvas, tableau, tractors, menagerie, and privileges. [Note that Mr. Marcks was not making a detailed list of wagons by numbers and contents but was instead giving a general listing of the type of wagon and what it loaded.]

"In the menagerie tent were 10 cages, 9 elephants, 5 camels, 2 zebras, monkeys, 3 polar bears, 7 lions, 9 leopards, 5 tigers, and 3 seals. [Note: It is believed a total of 12 cages were on the show. Possibly at the time Mr. Marcks made his count, 2 of the cages were in the backyard or elsewhere.]

"The big top had 4 center poles, 18 long quarter poles, 30 short quarter poles, 150 end poles. The reserved seats had 15 sections on the long side, 6 sections on the short side. Each were 12 rows high with 8 seats to a plank. The blue seats had 14 sections on each end and they were 15 rows high.

"In the side show they were featuring the Hawaiians, minstrels, sword box, snakes, comedy juggler, Punch and Judy, stocks, magic, sword walker, illusions, mind reader, Half Man-Half Woman, and a 9 piece band. They had 12 platforms inside with an outside bally stand and 3 ticket boxes.

"Other tents on the show included the dressing tent, 3 horse tents, dining room, kitchen, 3 candy stands, a cotton candy stand, and a novelty stand.

"Only small crowds attended the two shows. Shortly after the matinee had started the rain began to come down and it continued until after the cookhouse and horse tents were down and loaded.

"The remainder of the show was down, loaded and at the cars by 1 a.m. when they left for Dunkirk, N.Y."

Unfortunately, the Marcks notes do


Newspaper ad for Sparks Circus stand at Johnson City, Tenn., April 19, 1929. Pfening Archives.

(Season of 1929.)

JOHNSON CITY

FRIDAY, APRIL 19

THE INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN



SPARKS
CIRCUS

TWICE
DAILY
2-8 P.M.
DOORS
OPEN
1-7 P.M.

**NEW FEATURES THIS YEAR
GATHERED FROM EVERYWHERE.**

GORGEOUS STREET PARADE °
— 11 A.M. DAILY —

Seats on sale Circus Day at Whitehouse Drug Store
— Same price as at Show Grounds

not mention the street parade. Possibly it was not presented at North Adams.

A 382 mile Sunday run moved the show from North Adams to Dunkirk, N.Y. for performances on Monday, August 5. Moving westward rapidly the show headed into Ohio for 8 consecutive stands, Ashtabula, Painesville, Norwalk, Fremont, Sandusky, Greenville, Van Wert, and Bryan.

The Aug. 17, 1929 *Billboard* reported that the show made the long run from North Adams to Dunkirk in 14 hours. Dunkirk, N.Y. turned out big as did Ashtabula, Ohio. At Dunkirk, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson of George Connor's sideshow left. Alice Foster turned out with a beautiful wild west costume, pale blue velvet, at Painesville, Ohio. While Franz Woska was working the lion act, an upper platform fell with two lions at the top and there was a moment of excitement. However, he conquered the animals and closed the act to big applause. The wild west concert is a sure fire show with Etta and Carlos Carreon in charge and doing their big horse catch and Jim Foster catching four horses with one rope while standing on his head. Jim Brown, wrestler, closes the after-show with a wow. Another Sparks item in the same issue said that Whitey Cline formerly of the John Robinson Circus was now boss elephant man on Sparks taking the place of Walter McClain.

There was never any definite notice in the trade publications about Sam B. Dill leaving the show, but by late August the *Billboard* noted that Dill, formerly with the American Circus Corporation, has been in Chicago and reliable sources say he plans to take out a motorized show in the spring of 1930. [This report did indeed turn out to be correct.]

The August 24, 1929 *Billboard* said when Sparks played Greenville, Ohio, August 12, the show was in the area where many circus notables, past and present have lived, notable Annie Oakley, the famous lady sharpshooter of Buffalo Bill days. Ethel Lewis and Gladys Harrington left the Sparks show at Sandusky, O., August 10. Whitey Cline, boss elephant man, is putting the bulls through in fine shape with Polly Watkins as assistant. Capt. Firth, who works the seals in the center ring, had a heart attack during the act at Bryan, Ohio, August 14. The number was canceled at the night show. Mrs. Sam B. Dill visited at Sandusky, Ohio (which would indicate no doubt the Dills had been gone from the show for some time). Evelyn Skagg has replaced Ethel Lewis in the elephant act and is going over nicely. An update on clown alley had Paul Wentzel, producing joey; Pee Wee, acrobatic clown; Sig Bonhomme, Sammy Bennett, Herbert Snyder, Stanley



White, Spaulding Trio of acrobats, Charles Fortune, Red Feaster, and Joe Lewis.

Leaving Ohio the show moved over into Indiana to play Kendallville, August 15, then went on to Michigan for a 14 stand tour with initial date at Coldwater. Other Michigan stands were at Hillsdale, Detroit, played on Sunday, August 18, Mt. Clemens, Bad Axe, Saginaw, Flint, Alma, Cadillac, Petoskey, Traverse City, Ministee, Big Rapids, and Sturgis.

The Aug. 31, 1929 *Billboard* covered the first dates of the Michigan visit and noted the show gave two performances in Detroit but no parade. The Nelson family had a big date in their home town of Mt. Clemens the day after Detroit. Several personnel changes were noted. Ray Bailey, with the elephant act, was placed in Ring No. 1, taking the place of Evelyn Skagg. Neita Lamar left at Mt. Clemens and Louis Sanderson, calliope player, left at Saginaw and was replaced by Del Vecho. Now doing the announcements during the performance is Mac McGilicurdy, who formerly was with Hagenbeck-Wallace and the 101 Ranch shows.

The Sept. 7, 1929 *Billboard* continued coverage of Sparks' Michigan tour and said ideal weather prevailed through the northern route of the state and that at Cadillac, August 24, Manager H.B. Gentry and his assistant Frank Meyers had the dusty track well drenched. George Singleton, boss canvasman, and assistants pitched every department in good order. There was a late arrival and a two mile haul. Other notes said that Equestrian Director Charles Barry is putting over a snappy program. Band-

Air calliope (left) and cages on the Sparks Circus lot, season of 1929. Menagerie tent is in background. Maurice Allaire Collection.

master C.L. Brown's latest march, Rockland, is scoring with the audiences. He has written and dedicated this number to Kenneth V. White, bandmaster and cornet soloist of the Rockland, Maine, City Band. Evelyn Skagg is now in the third ring handling canines and the act is going nicely. Harry Bell, ticket seller, is temporarily 24 hour man. Acrobatic Ted of the Spaulding Trio left at Cadillac and has been replaced by Red Feaster. A final item said that the sideshow band is a whiz bang. It is headed by Chauncey (Cuba) Gibson, who also plays baritone. The band roster includes six other musicians, a comedian and dancer.

This article was the first mention that Frank Meyers was now serving as assistant manager to H.B. Gentry. In all probability he was named to the post after Sam B. Dill left.

Following the Michigan trip the show returned to Indiana where 10 dates would be played in the Hoosier state. They included Warsaw, Kokomo, Marion, Anderson, Rushville, Columbus, Martinsville, Bloomington, Bedford, and Washington.

The Sept. 14, 1929 *Billboard* reported that Anna Ledgett is a new ar-

Sparks Circus midway on the lot. In near foreground is the pit show, red ticket wagon, and concession stands while in background is the main sideshow bannerline and tent. Season is believed to be 1929, but possibly earlier. Pfening Archives.

rival on Sparks and was doing menage and ladder in the performance. She is the daughter of Fred Ledgett, equestrian director of Sells-Floto. Bill Hart, boss head porter, has been replaced by Al Curtis, supt. of the privilege car. The article noted that Captain Frank Phillips, of MGM pictures working lions, is on the show and working the pig act in rube costume.

The following week the *Billboard* said that the show had two packed houses at Bloomington, Indiana, the home of manager Gentry. Before the night show the lot was drenched with heavy rainfall, but the natives were loyal and turned out in numbers that made the management smile. There was also a note that a wonderful article on the Nelson Family had appeared in their hometown newspaper at Mt. Clemens, Mich. It said that the crowd in that city when Sparks played recently was increased by at least 25 percent by the appearance of the Nelson family which is the stellar attraction of the performance this year. It was mentioned that Rosina Nelson, known to the circus world as the dancing phenomena of the silver thread, is the star of the act. She recently canceled a big-time vaudeville act to join her family with the Sparks Circus, and is the only woman appearing under the big tops today who turns a somersault on the tight wire. It was noted that Dell Bonhomme was now wardrobe mistress on the show and also worked menage and canines in the performance.

While Sparks was playing Columbus, Indiana, September 6, one of the greatest events in American circus history took place. That was the day that John Ringling purchased the American Circus Corporation. The deal included the Peru, Indiana quarters and the five circuses then on tour, Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson, Al G. Barnes, and Sparks. With his own Ringling-Barnum show on the road, John Ringling, now owned a total of six active railroad circuses. Ringling made an important decision immediately and that was he would make no changes in the management of the individual shows he had purchased from the American Circus Corporation for the time being and each



would play out its route as planned.

Sparks final stand in Indiana was at Washington in September then the show went into Illinois for Flora, Lawrenceville, Harrisburg, Mt. Vernon and McLeansboro. Next came a tour of Kentucky to play Owensboro, Madisonville, Bowling Green, Glasgow, Central City, and Paducah which was followed by a return visit to Illinois and stands at Marion, Murphysboro, and Cairo. The last day of the twenty-fourth week of the season saw the show at Flat River, Mo. on September 28.

The Sept. 28, 1929 *Billboard* said that the big man himself, John Ringling, visited the Sparks show at Flora, Illinois on September 12. He was accompanied by Ben Austin and they witnessed the parade and matinee performance. At Harrisburg, Ill., Sept. 14, a cloudburst flooded the lot and buckets were used to drain water from the dressing room. It was noted that the show had been in three states within one week, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky. At Owensboro, Ky., Sept. 18, the home of Zack Terrell, manager of Sells-Floto, the Sparks show drew capacity at the evening performance. The Arenson Bros., tight-rope balancing act received an ovation in Owensboro. The article said that Harriet Guilfoyle, who had worked the leopard act left the show in Bedford, Indiana and that the act was now being handled by Capt. Frank Phillips. There continued to be personnel changes in the Sparks roster and it was mentioned that bandmaster C.L. Brown had departed at Anderson, Indiana and was replaced by Horace (Hodd) Smith, the first chair cornet player. Three new musicians also had joined during the past week.

The Oct. 5, 1929 *Billboard* had more to say about the show's tour of Kentucky. At Paducah, Sept. 24, the show had a fair matinee and capacity night house. The *Herald* there stated that the program is a peppy and snappy one. Red Cole, trainmaster, has the show moving in good time. Evelyn Skagg left at Central City for her home in Lexington. A new number in the program is that of Ruby Hoyt, placing her head in an elephant's mouth and allowing it to carry her the entire length of the hippodrome track. Walter Guice has completed his new net. On the first showing, Ted Tipton, comedy man, had his hand badly burned in the finish stunt of the hammer gun, which exploded before the proper time. Regardless of pain, he still appears in the act. At Bowling Green, at the finish of the tiger act, a battle occurred between the cats, and Prince was badly torn up. Franz Woska says that John Ringling will have him train the largest tiger act ever presented. (Author's note; Although Woska continued to work a tiger act



Sparks Circus sideshow bannerline. Season is believed to be 1929 but possibly earlier. Pfening Archives.

on Sparks during the 1930 and 1931 seasons when the show was owned by Ringling the number of animals was essentially the same as those used in 1929). A final performance note had it that Rosina Nelson on the silver wire never fails to score and that Carmicita Nelson's flipflops, carrying the full length of the grandstand is a sure-fire applause stunt. Carlos Carreon has added to his string a high bred Kentucky horse for high jumping.

After going into Missouri at Flat River Sparks played two more dates in the state, Cape Girardeau and Caruthersville, then moved into Arkansas for Blytheville and Jonesboro, then it was back into Missouri for one date, West Plains, October 4, and finally back to Arkansas for seven consecu-

Sam B. Dill, assistant manager, Sparks Circus, season of 1929. Pfening Archives.



tive stands, Walnut Ridge, Batesville, Conway, Russellville, Morrillton, Hot Springs, and Pine Bluff.

Very little was printed concerning the tour of Missouri but the Oct. 12, 1929 *Billboard* did mention the show had a couple of distinguished visitors at Cape Girardeau, Senator Russell L. Dearmont and W.P. Olive, secretary of the fair board. Mayor James Banks also attended the afternoon show and later visited in the dressing room.

An excellent article appeared in the Oct. 19, 1929 *Billboard* which read as follows: "NEALAND VISITS SPARKS CIRCUS. Sparks Circus enjoyed a splendid day's business October 8 at Conway, Ark., reports Walter D. Nealand, who visited the show and enjoyed the fine program.

"As an example of circus efficiency, the show train was late in arriving, it being 10:30 a.m. when the 20 cars rolled into the freight yards. At 1 p.m. the parade was traversing the 'main stem,' and many watched the pageant. The doors opened promptly and a large crowd was on hand for the matinee. The program, under the efficient direction of Charles Berry, moves with a snap and dash. There are no 'waits' and each and every act went over with a bang.

"The Famous Nelson Family are featured, and scored a big hit with their well-known Risley act that has been a feature with all of the big circuses, including the Ringling-Barnum, for years. Rosina Nelson, in her wire-walking act, was an individual triumph. Franz Woska handles the black-maned lion act, and also works the eight tiger act, which is a thriller. Two groups of rotation horses are splendidly handled by Charles Berry and Carlos Carreon. Frank Phillips, until recently with the M-G-M movie lion, Leo, presents the leopard act in fine style. The Walter Guice Troupe is versatile and clever, as evidenced by the manner in which its riding and aerial act is presented.

"H.B. Gentry is manager, with Frank Myers, assistant. J.C. Kelly is legal adjuster, and Fred Bailey Hutchinson presides at the main entrance. George W. Connors is sideshow mana-



ger and Carlos Carreon has the wild west features in the concert. Hilda Nelson celebrated a birthday at Conway and received many handsome presents."

The late William H. Woodcock Sr., caught the Sparks show at Hot Springs, Ark., Oct. 11, 1929 and wrote the author the following.

"The Sparks parade equipment mainly was painted white, always a strong tendency of H.B. Gentry. Jake Posey was boss hostler, and P.G. Gibbons, elephant boss. The show did not have a sideshow band when I saw it."

The latter bit about no sideshow band is interesting. Evidently it had left within the last few weeks. It seems that the show had considerable trouble with its bands in 1929, possibly over union matters. There is no mention of when the sideshow band departed in the trade publications.

Leaving Arkansas the show moved into Mississippi and began its twenty-seventh week at Vicksburg which was followed by Kosciusko, Water Valley, Winona, and Columbus. Next came two days in Alabama at Jasper and Greenville, and then it was down into Florida where the show would spend the remaining two weeks of the season. Sparks was billed to play its first date in the Sunshine State at Pensacola, October 22, which would see its share of circuses. John Robinson played the city in September and Christy Bros. on October 18, just four days before Sparks.

Little or nothing appeared in the trade publications concerning Sparks for the final weeks of the season. One short note in the Sept. 21, 1929 *Billboard* said that C.L. Hollowell, the tourist man of Memphis, was on the Sparks show a few days back when it was in Michigan and reported that H.B. Gentry has things well in hand and everything seems to be running smoothly as though Charlie Sparks were on the job. A brief note in the "Under the Marquee" section of the Oct. 12, 1929 *Billboard* said that G.W. Tallent, showman, writes that Sparks had two big crowds at Cape Girardeau, Mo. It is a real circus city of 30,000.

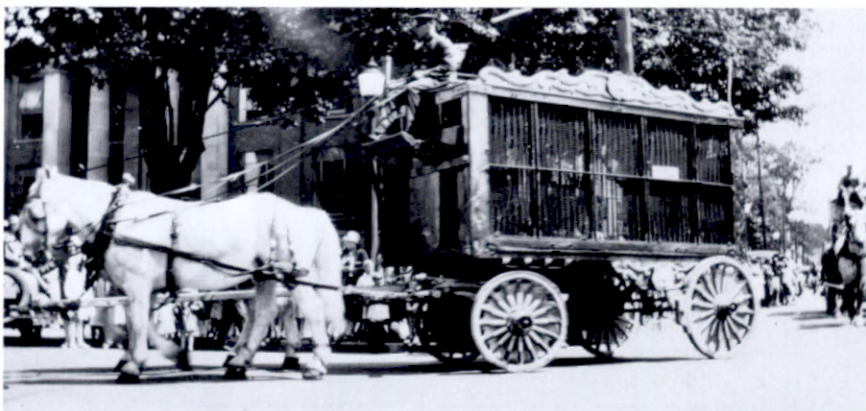
The October 1929 *White Tops* had an interesting Sparks item. Karl K. Knecht, the *White Tops* editor, visited

Sparks Circus on the lot. In foreground from right is the marquee and menagerie tent while in back is the big top. Season is believed to be 1929 but possibly earlier. Pfening Archives.

Sparks at Lawrenceville, Ill. on September 13 (John Ringling had been there the day before at Flora, Ill.) and the personnel were still talking about how fine John Ringling thought the program was. Frank Meyers is the assistant manager. The Nelson Family is featured, Rosina has the wire act and Camincitia does flipflaps down the track. Franz Woska's tigers and lions are well presented. The bulls work fine. Ethel Lewis has the center ring group. Wright Duo has a great novelty equilibristic act.

Following the initial Florida stand at Pensacola the show completed its twenty-eighth week by playing Chipley, Tallahassee, Lake City, and Ocala. After a Sunday run of 123 miles over the S.A.L. Railway the show moved to St. Petersburg where performances were given on Monday, October 28. This date began the twenty-ninth and final week of the 1929 season. When the advance car was in St. Petersburg to bill the city the boys from the car were entertained by C.C. (Peck) Walters, who at one time was a member of the advance car of the Barnum & Bailey Circus under Tom Dailey. Dailey is now president of the C.C.

Cage wagon in Sparks Circus parade at Dunkirk, N.Y., Aug. 5, 1929. Photo by Frank A. Norton (Joe Bradbury Collection).



Walters Printing Company Inc. being established in the city for the last 15 years. Other stands in Florida during the final week came at Tampa, Lakeland, Orlando, DeLand, and the last stand in 1929 was in Gainesville on November 2. The show was then sent to its regular winterquarters in Macon, Ga. Total mileage for the season had been 14,958.

The Nov. 2, 1929 *Billboard* carried its final article on the show for the season, mentioning only that the show would close this date in Gainesville, Fla. and gave the destination, as customary, of the personnel. A few who had their homes in Macon would accompany the train back to quarters but most would scatter out to their homes all over the country. On the same page in the *Billboard* which contained the final Sparks story was an advertisement announcing the bankruptcy sale of Floyd and Howard King's 15 car Gentry Bros. Circus, the property being stored at the Paris, Tenn. fairgrounds. The Gentry show which had folded a short time before was the second railroad casualty of the 1929 season, the Buck Jones Wild West having closed back in July.

Generally, the 1929 season had been good to the rest of the shows which had made the season. Sells-Floto with Tom Mix Himself had been a great winner, Ringling-Barnum had also done fine, and the late Theo Forstall who had been treasurer of the Al G. Barnes Circus once told me that the 1929 season had earned in profits the amount expended for its purchase back in early January of the year.

Documents in the Circus World Museum file indicate that Sparks Circus had a net profit for the 11 months which ended November 30, 1929, exclusive of depreciation, of \$39,467.03. Although this profit is indeed impressive for a single year's operation by the American Circus Corporation and later John Ringling, it is quite small compared to that of Al G. Barnes assuming Theo Forstall was correct in his figures.

As the nation's circuses were making their final stands of the 1929

OFFICIAL ROUTE CARD



THE 20TH CENTURY WONDER SHOW

Permanent Address, Peru, Indiana

Season 1929

Sixth Week

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----|
| May 20—Chester, Pa. | W.B.A. & Pa. | 102 |
| May 21—Norristown, Pa. | Phil. & Read. | 32 |
| May 22—Bethlehem, Pa. | Phil. & Read. | 100 |
| May 23—Mt. Carmel, Pa. | Phil. & Read. | 50 |
| May 24—Hazelton, Pa. | Penna. | 29 |
| May 25—Honesdale, Pa. | Le. Val. & Erie | 119 |

Seventh Week

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-----|
| May 27—Montclair, N. J. | Erie R.R. | 141 |
| May 28—Englewood, N. J. | Erie R.R. | 23 |
| May 29—Newburgh, N. Y. | Erie R.R. | 58 |
| May 30—Westwood, N. J. | Erie R.R. | 49 |
| May 31—Westfield, N. J. | Erie, Penn., C. of N. J. | 30 |
| J'ne 1—Stapleton, S. I., N. Y. | S. I. R. P. Tran. | 10 |

Eighth Week

| | | |
|-------------------------------|------|----|
| J'ne 3—Jackson Heights, L. I. | Erie | 40 |
|-------------------------------|------|----|

R. LOUIS SANDERSON, Mail Agent.

season an event took place on Friday, October 25 which would control their destiny for a decade to come. Known ever afterwards as Black Friday, it was the day of the Wall Street stock market crash in which millions of paper profits were lost forever. Millionaires were wiped out in a single



The Sparks Circus herd of nine elephants, each with an advertising banner, is pictured in the daily street parade. Date is not certain but is definitely late 1920's, possibly 1929. Joe Bradbury Collection.

day. The stock market crash signaled the beginning of the great depression which would then not really end until World War II. However, all of this could not be foreseen for many weeks, even months to come. As far as John Ringling was concerned he had every reason to believe the 1930 season would be another great season for his six circuses now safely in winter-quarters. All of his shows had gone back to their homes of the previous winter: Ringling-Barnum, Sarasota, Fla.; Sparks, Macon, Ga.; Al G. Barnes, Baldwin Park, Calif. and Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, and John Robinson all at Peru, Indiana.

Henry B. Gentry was the only manager of the five former American Circus Corporation shows who would not be retained by John Ringling. Gentry would be replaced in early 1930 by Ira M. Watts. Sparks would be sent out

again in 1930 on 20 cars but the street parade would be abolished. Many of the feature acts of the 1929 performance would be retained as well as some of the staffers.

Epilogue: It is *Bandwagon's* intention to carry the Sparks history on through the final two seasons in which the show was operated by John Ringling, 1930 and 1931. However, it is felt that the current author covered the 1930 season adequately in his article titled "John Ringling's Circus Empire, His Six Railroad Circuses in 1930" which was printed in *The White Tops*, Nov.-Dec. 1971, Jan.-Feb. 1972, and Mar.-Apr. 1972 issues. *Bandwagon* will run a photo supplement with a number of "new" 1930 Sparks photos in a subsequent issue and this will be followed by a full and complete article covering the final 1931 season. The author wishes to thank the following who helped in the preparation of the article just concluded: Fed D. Pfening, Jr., Fred Dahlinger Jr., Chang Reynolds, Maurice Allaire, Don Mareks, and Gordon Carver.

BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS

Ringling Bros.
WORLD'S GREATEST SHOWS

REAL ROMAN HIPPODROME.
OLYMPIAN SPORTS.
GLADIATORIAL COMBATS.
THREE RING CIRCUS.
MONSTER ELEVATED STAGES.
WONDROUS WORLD'S HORSE FAIR.
TRAINED ANIMAL CONGRESS.
AQUARIUM OF MARINE WONDERS.
1000 PEOPLE. 300 HORSES.

The largest and best Amusement Institution in the World.
Stupendous Spectacular Pageants.
Mammoth Million Dollar Menagerie.
Curious Colossal Museum.
Acting Caravan - All kinds of Thrilling Races - Daring Mid Air Feats.

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Sole Owners & Managers
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MILLIONS INVESTED IN
AMERICA'S REPRESENTATIVE SHOWS.

This letterhead was used by the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows in 1894. It is lithographed in black with gold around the heads of the owners. Also in gold is the line "Millions Invested In America's Representative Shows." The letterhead was designed and printed by the Courier Co. of Buffalo, New York.

The Flamboyant Showman and His Six Title Circus

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

Rice Bros. Circus 1936

PART TWO

In part one of this article appearing in the July-August 1983 *Bandwagon* reference was made to the possibility that Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell planned two circuses for the 1935 season. Following publication of that article circus historian Gordon M. Potter presented additional evidence that this was indeed the plan. Potter advises, "Shortly after Allan King and the six elephants went to Rice Bros. Circus from the Cole show I talked to Jess Adkins and mentioned the move to him. He said something like 'Well, maybe we can make some money.' At the time I took this to mean he and Zack Terrell had invested in Rice Bros. But perhaps he just meant they would gain through a leasing deal.

"I believe it was in 1939 that I had a fairly long talk with Adkins and asked about the Cole show in 1935, the narrow big top, adding two more center poles and so on. He told me about how their original plan was to operate two railroad circuses in 1935. A 20 car show with the Cole Bros. title, managed by him using the 145 foot top and three 50 foot middles. And a 15 car show managed by Zack Terrell to be sponsored by Standard Oil Co. Both were to have a street parade, with the Spellman tableaux on the smaller show. When the Standard Oil deal fell through they tried to get the tent company in Chicago (probably United States Tent and Awning) to change the order for the big top and let them get a larger one. But the tent manufacturer said work was too far along to make a change, so they had to take it as they had already paid quite a bit on it. But he said they saw right away that the seating capacity was not great enough for the larger show. So they had to get two more center poles and middle pieces. Adkins then said they would never order any more tents from that outfit. I believe that all, or most, of their canvas came from Baker-Lockwood after that."

This information further confirms that two shows were planned for the 1935 season, and that Allan King had been signed to appear with the smaller show. King had appeared in 1934 at the Chicago World's Fair in a wild

animal show sponsored by the Standard Oil Co. Having been identified with the large oil company it was natural that the association would have been continued. The first article was wrong, however, in suggesting that the smaller show was to have been on trucks.

It was also suggested that Adkins and Terrell may have invested in the Rice Bros. Circus. It is most doubtful that this was the case. From another source, however, comes word that Jess Adkins may have loaned Ray Marsh Brydon money on a personal basis. The relationship between the Cole and Rice shows continued in the following years by the continued leasing of elephants.

RICE BROS. CIRCUS 1936

Ray Marsh Brydon had made quite a splash in the circus business during the 1935 season. He gained complete ownership of the show, at least on paper, and had a long tour.

After the Rice show was settled in winter quarters in Jackson, Tennessee, Brydon opened his store show in Chattanooga and toured it for two months, closing in Anniston, Alabama late in January of 1936. On February 2, Brydon wrote to Karl Knecht, then editor of the *White Tops* magazine as

The Rice Bros. Circus sideshow canvas semi carried the center poles on top. The complete kid show loaded in this truck. All photos are from the Pfening Archives unless otherwise noted.

follows, "Suppose that Deacon [Albright] has by this time told you what a tough winter we had. He cries the blues so easy, in fact he cried last summer when things were really good.

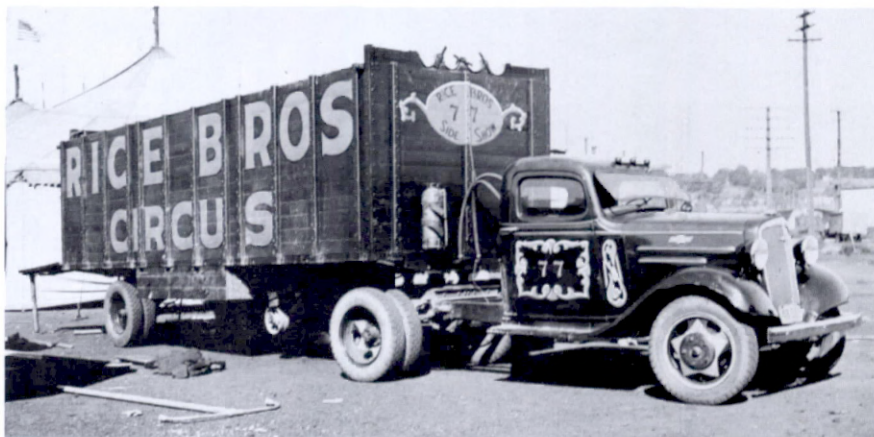
"The ten weeks I had the store show out I lost about \$2,000. In the entire time we never had one Saturday that was a winner, either snow, ice, sleet or rain.

"Have now come in here to put the balance of the winter getting the Rice Circus ready for the road. We have 27 men in quarters working and they have accomplished a lot, although the cold weather the past week has slowed them up a bit. We have signed some very good features for the summer and I look for a fine year. We are rebuilding the show completely."

But as late as February 1, Brydon had not started booking a route. A letter from Brydon, dated February 1, to Dud Lawrence reads: "As I understand you are not to be with the Tom Mix Circus the coming season. I was wondering if you would entertain a proposition to route and contract Rice Brothers Circus for the coming year. Please write me at once and tell me if you're at liberty and if you still have your car. What is your salary, you to pay your own room and board and furnish car."

It is not known if Lawrence answered his letter, or in fact who routed the show, as a general agent was not listed in a roster published in the *Billboard* after the opening.

Brydon was a showman to the core and had either a news article or a want ad in nearly every issue of the *Bill-*



board. He loved to toot his horn and did so at every opportunity.

A news story about the Rice quarters appeared in the February 8, *Billboard* which stated that while the weather had been unusually cold, the fairground's buildings were weather-proofed and suitable for housing the stock. Jack Walsh had arrived from his home in Philadelphia to take charge of the winter quarters kitchen and to get ready for the road season. Jim Williams was in charge of the animal barn and had been working on new routines. W.D. Storey, auditor, had been getting out a new line of stationery and a set of books for the new season. Owen Webb and Charlie Heath, in the carpenter shop, had completed 12 sections of 10 high blues. Any day a shipment of cat animals was to arrive from the Cole show. The show was to be equipped with 40 trucks, 23 of these with semi-trailers, 20 feet in length. The band was to consist of 12 pieces, Tommy Comstock in charge. The advance was to travel in three cars and two bill trucks.

It is not known if Brydon wrote the article or not, but it is typical of his exaggeration of some things and total fabrication of others. The reference to 40 trucks was hogwash. The show, never traveled on more than 20 or so show owned motor units, as a listing of the trucks will later show.

One of Brydon's famous "want ads" appeared in the February 29 *Billboard*. It read, "Rice Bros. World Toured Circus contracting now to complete the most pretentious array of circus talent ever assembled under canvas with a motor circus. This show will live up to the billing—AMERICA'S CIRCUS BEAUTIFUL. WANT a few more teams or trios doing one or more acts, preferably Iron Jaw, Perch, Traps. Perez Trio reply. Clowns with plenty of changes, must feature all white wardrobe and play instrument for clown band. NOTICE—HARRY LAPEARL IS POSITIVELY CONTRACTED WITH THIS SHOW AND IS TO BE PRODUCING CLOWN. To complete big show band of 16 pieces,



The No. 80 Rice semi-trailer carried the three elephants on lease from the Cole show. The trailer was built by the Eli Bridge Co.

under direction of TOMMY COM-STOCK, need few more pieces. Also want A-1 scenic artist who can make up and work from pounce patterns. Also want good letterer who can stripe and lay goldleaf. WANTED—A male quartet to sing with band on come-in and do two numbers during show. Also two more PRIMA DONNAS, DANCERS—Can place for Spectacle 3 SPANISH DANCERS. Must be able to use Castanets. Wardrobe, youth and appearance essential. Big Show announcer. Want to hear from Geo. Meyers of York, Pa. Notice to all. Long season, good cook house, best of sleeping trailers for single people. Teams or acts having own house cars given preference. When you answer, you must send us a late photo, and positively state salary you expect. Show opens April 11. Call for rehearsal, Monday, April 6." Ads like this one appeared during the season, all loaded with heavy sprinklings of the same tripe.

The March 7 *Billboard* told that Brydon brought a truckload of animals

This straight truck carried jacks for the bleachers and grandstand.



from the Cole winter quarters in Rochester, Indiana. It also noted that it was with keen regret that Brydon had released Burt Wallace, equestrian director, who, with Mrs. Wallace, left to join Downie Bros. in response to a flattering offer made by Charles Sparks. Word had been received from Trenton, Michigan, winter quarters of Buck Owens, that his big semi-trailer, which was to be used to carry his bucking horses, nearing completion and was to be a thing of beauty.

The following week another big article appeared concerning the Rice show. In this one Brydon stated that a Florida-like sunshine brought more than 1,000 local visitors to the quarters on Sunday. George Jennier had replaced Harry LaPearl as producing clown (in spite of the prior statement that LaPearl had been positively contracted). L.B. "Doc" Ford succeeded Burt Wallace as equestrian director. Charlie Goss, of Standard Chevrolet Co., East St. Louis, Illinois, inspected the quarters and after spending several hours with Brydon left with an order for new Chevrolet tractors. Ted Reed completed a new canvas truck and a semi-sleeper for the big show band.

In the same March 14 issue of the *Billboard* Brydon ran another of his classic advertisements. This one was the most extensive of the 1936 season. This ad, two columns by two inches must have set a record for the number of words in a given space. It was set in four point type. (The *Bandwagon* is set in eight point.) Some highlights of the ad follow:

CALL CALL CALL
RICE BROTHERS WORLD TOURED CIRCUS—BUCK OWENS WILD WEST Opening Jackson, Tenn., Saturday April 11. Rehearsal call and working hands report on dates given to the following department heads: All Big Show performers report to L.B. FORD, Equestrian Director, Monday, April 6. Big Show band to TOMMY COM-STOCK, Monday April 6. Clowns to DANNY McPRIDE, Principal Clown, Monday April 6. Ushers to PETE



Buck Owens' name appears on this Rice sleeper bus, but Owens was never with the show.

JONES, Supt. of Ushers, April 10. Big Show Ticket Sellers to WM. HEATH, Supt. of Tickets, Friday, April 10. Menagerie Help to CAPT. MARION GRAVES, Monday April 6. Grooms, Ring Stock and Pony Boys to JERRY SWEETLAND, Monday April 6. Property Men to CLARENCE HARMAN, Supt. of Props, Monday April 6. Electrical Dept. to FLOYD HARVEY, Supt. of Lights, Monday April 6. Big Top Canvasmen, Sailmakers, Riggers, Seatmen to BILL O'DAY. Report now. Side Show Performers and Colored Band to RAY CRAMER, Side Show Manager. Side Show Canvasmen to DAN WHITE, Side Show Supt. Cookhouse, Waiters, Campfire Boy, Second Cook to JACK WALSH, now. All Privilege People contracted report Monday April 6. NOTE—Still a few vacancies in various departments. Those interested write to respective Dept. Heads. Cramer wants to hear from Freak to feature, Grinding Ticket Sellers (Must make second openings), Snake act (Eva LaTour, or any other attractive snake handler, reply.) Principal Lecturer who can make openings on freak or dancers. Peck and Flo (Tickets and dancer) reply. Pygmies, Dwarfs (white or colored) for Bally. Little Mike Buhnia wire. Few privileges still unsold: 4 minute Photo Studio, Ball Game (Hit or Miss), Milk Bottles or Big Cats, Hi Striker, Long Range Lead Gallery, Mitt Camp (No Gypsies), Erie Diggers, Dinny Moore contact me. The stands: Corn, Floss, Sweets, Novelties, Custard are all sold, so don't write for them. TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: We have been criticized in the past for the style and number of Concessions we have on our Midway. Our theory is, if there's a demand, supply it. Will guarantee bigger crowds than the average fair, with a show properly billed, a performance that will repeat and money territory, so let's hear from you Concessioners asked for. All must have own transportation and the best of equipment. HAVE FOR SALE—Complete set of Single Deck 8 x 8 Side Show Banners, used 14 weeks last



The No. 42 Rice truck was used to carry props and ring curb in 1936.

year, for open front show, practically new, cost \$25 apiece, will take \$8 apiece or \$150 for complete front, 26 banners in all, including 8 x 15 Doorway and 2 Double Deck Descriptive 8 x 14, for Ends. A REAL BUY. REASON FOR SELLING, GETTING ALL NEW DOUBLE DECK BANNERS FROM CAD HILL. Write us for list on above banners. All reply to: RAY MARSH BRYDON, RICE BROS. CIRCUS, P.O. BOX 1665, JACKSON, TENN."

The reference to the number of joints on the Rice midway shows Brydon's years of carnival background and experience. No mention of "lucky boys" and grift privileges appear in the ad, but there was no need to advertise for them. They made their own contact. The mention of "lecturers" to make openings for dancers addressed the use of red hot "blowoffs" in the private, screened off end of the side show, where for a slight additional charge red blooded men were instructed in the details of the female anatomy.

A third mention of the Rice show appeared in this same issue of the *Billboard*. It stated that the *Jackson Sun* of March 2 had published an article concerning the amount of money being spent and circulated in Jackson during the process of rebuilding and getting the show ready for its tour. It contrasted with comments from people with the show who suggested that most of the purchases made were on credit. Jackie Stevens, Brydon's long time midget associate, hocked his diamond ring to get the show out of quarters for the 1936 tour.

The March 21 issue of the *Billboard* carried a news story advising that Elmer Yancey, brigade agent of Rice Bros. Circus, and his billers were rapidly covering Jackson and the surrounding territory for the opening on April 11. Lord Leo, English midget, wrote that he would be on hand for the opening. (This was an inside joke, as Little Lord Leo was the non-de-plume of Jackie Stevens, who had been in quarters with Brydon since the close of the store show.) Danny McPride, for years with the Ringlings, had signed as principal clown. Fred Nelson was

lettering and striping the wagons. Fred Eader, booking representative of Kansas City, sent signed contracts for the "Thousand Pounds of Harmony" quartet, which was to be featured in the big show on the come-in and in the spec. The Perez Trio had signed to present an acrobatic act; Flora Perez, iron jaw, and Manuel and Manuel Jr. to do Jackly drops. The Frederick Trio had signed with Ray Cramer, side show manager, with a musical act and illusions. The Halligans (Lady Leona, mentalist) would again, for fourth season, be under the management of Cramer.

As opening date drew near the trucks were repainted and pictorially embellished by Tex Stuart, Fred Nelson and Ross Heath. Tommy Comstock arrived in Jackson by April 4 and other show personnel arrived each day.

The last pre-opening article appeared in the April 11 issue of the *Billboard*. In this article, dated April 4, Brydon advised that due to the expectation of an unusually large crowd in Jackson for the April 11 opening, arrangement had been made to give an extra show at 10 a.m. especially for children. Tickets for this show were sold in schools. Merchants' exhibits housed in a large tent at the entrance to the big show were open during the week. The 20 foot elephant trailer had been sent to Rochester, Ind., to obtain several elephants from the Cole-Beatty quarters.

This single reference to picking up the Cole show elephants is the key to identifying the Rice show bulls. Adkins and Terrell had leased elephants to Brydon for the 1935 season. They were returned after the close of the season. The article on the 1935 season stated that six elephants from the Cole show went to Rice. In checking further with Chang Reynolds on the history of these elephants it turns out that only three elephants went to Rice.

Reynolds advises that nine elephants were returned to Rochester in 1935 after the Cole show was cut back in Cumberland, Maryland. Three of

these were sent to Rice Bros. Circus and later the other six went to Fernandez in Hawaii. Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus owned 28 elephants in 1936, but on opening day only 20 were taken on tour. Reynolds suggests that the three on the Rice show were George, Moton (Barney) and Little Kate. Brydon advertised the group as the Ad-Zac Elephants, after Adkins and Zack Terrell, owners of the Cole show.

The mention of the additional new Chevrolet trucks was apparently true, as photos taken during the 1936 season show most of the trucks and semis equipped with Chevrolets, all of the same model year. A new semi-trailer, reported in *Billboard* as a 24 foot horse trailer, was picked up at the Eli Bridge factory. Eli Bridge used a photo of the Rice-lettered trailer in a *Billboard* advertisement a week or so later. However the semi-trailer shown in the Eli Bridge ad was the elephant truck. Brydon may have purchased a second trailer from them that was used for horses.

All elements of the weather seemed to have entered into a conspiracy to annihilate the Rice show when it opened under the auspices of the West Tennessee District Fair Association, where the show had spent the winter at the fairgrounds. The day was cold and wet, but the spirits of show personnel were high. An opening preview was given on April 10, and attracted several hundred. On April 11, the show was rained out at night and only a mere handful of dyed-in-the-wool circus lovers braved the elements to put in an appearance. Confronted with many obstacles, Brydon proved himself a Trojan. With mud all around him, he and his staff succeeded in getting the show down and loaded. Sunday the trucks left Jackson and played to good business and sunshine in Fulton, Kentucky, on Monday April 13.

The program of the opening performance was as follows:

- No. 1—Grand Entry.
- No. 2—Cloud swing, Ria Duffy, Mary Miller, Helen Duffy.
- No. 3—Clowns.
- No. 4—Ponies, trained and presented by Jim Williams.
- No. 5—Swinging ladders, Helen Duffy, Mary Miller, Esther Sutton, Anna Sutton, Ria Duffy.
- No. 6—Madame Bedini, in Act Beautiful.
- No. 7—Dogs, presented by Marion Pervis, Capt. Reed and Dolly Davis. (First concert announcement.)
- No. 8—Foot slide by Al Bedell, done with roller skates.
- No. 9—Danny McPride and his wonder dogs.
- No. 10—High jumping horses. Riders, Harry Butcher, Estelle Taylor, Jitney Wright, Harry Taylor, Mary Cardinal.



This big top canvas semi-trailer was used as a bandwagon in Rice parades.

- No. 11—Rings, Ria Duffy; iron jaw, Flo Perez; aerial loop, Mary Miller.
- No. 12—Betty Burtis, trained doves; Betty Miller, toy fox dogs; cockatoos. On the track, Jim Williams and leap-ing greyhounds.
- No. 13—Clown numbers.
- No. 14—Menage mules, Dick Colvin, Rube Eagan; bucking mule, Jim Henry.
- No. 15—Menage horses, trained and presented by Sir Victor and Madame Bedini.
- No. 16—Rice Bros. elephants, presented by Capt. Smith. (Second concert announcement.)
- No. 17—Clowns.
- No. 18—Wire acts, Al Bedell, Great Kodaz, Mary Miller.
- No. 19—Clowns, headed by Danny McPride, producing clown.
- No. 20—Menage, Harry Butcher, Jitney Wright, Estelle and Henry Taylor.
- No. 21—Riding dogs and monks,

Mary Miller was featured in all of the Brydon shows from 1935 through 1938. She did low wire and some aerial turns.



presented by Esther Sutton, Jim Williams, Anna Sutton.

- No. 22—Clowns.
- No. 23—Perez Trio, acrobats and Mary Miller, gymnast.
- No. 24—Clowns.
- No. 25—Rice ponies and Bedini ponies.
- No. 26—Five Flying Burtis.

The wild west concert was headed by Harry Taylor, with Shorty Bucher, all around hand; Jitney Wright, trick rider and knife throwing; Joe Moreno, roping and trick rider; Mary Cardinal, trick rider and jumping horse; Henrietta Moreno, trick rider and menage; Esther Sutton, trick rider; Anna Sutton, menage.

All of the pre-opening talk about Buck Owens being with the show apparently had no foundation, as he was not there on opening day. Owen's name did appear on at least one truck; however, so Brydon must have thought he had a deal with the movie cowboy.

Lillian Navarre, prima donna sang with the band during the preshow concert. During the program the Thousand Pounds of Harmony Quartet rendered selections. The band was under the direction of Tommy Comstock, who also played the air calliope, with John Dusch as leader. Frank Ludwing and Jack Cheuvrant, drummers; Bill Krajewsky, Ed Falte and Bill Fowler, cornets; Walter Cook and Percy Turner, trombones; Louis Mitendorf, baritone; E.W. Eyestone and Jack Fogg, bass; Jack Leffel and Carl Piefer, clarinets.

The Rice show played twenty-two dates in Kentucky, nearly all of them in rain, wind and floods. The opening weeks of the season did not bring large crowds to the ticket wagon. Charlie Goss and Frank House, president of Standard Chevrolet Company of East St. Louis, Illinois, were on the show during the first week. The truck dealer had sold ten to twelve trucks to Brydon, and he was no doubt checking about payments on these units. Brydon probably had made a small cash down payment and was to pay the balance during the season.

The roster of show personnel was



published in the May 2 *Billboard*. The staff included the following: Big Show: Ray Marsh Brydon, general manager; Champ Simpson, treasurer; W.D. Storey, secretary; Ted Reed, general superintendent; William J. Hilliar, contracting press agent; W.D. Henry, superintendent of privileges; John Dusch, band leader; Whity Gibson, front door auditor.

Owen (Slim) Webb, master of transportation; H.E. Newberry, chief electrician and master mechanic; William O'Day, boss canvasman; Jimmy LaRue, property boss, J.E. Smith, superintendent of menagerie and elephants; Jack Walsh, cookhouse steward.

Ray Cramer was the side show manager, and presented the following attractions: Marior Scotch Highlanders, Little Lord Leo (Jackie Stevens), midget; Laury Johnson, sword swallower; Ruth Duncan, giantess; Elizabeth Webb, sword box; Tony Culliar, iron tongue and fire worshipper; Melle. Lizette, snakes, Tazola, ape man; Jo-Ho and Wa-Hoo, pin heads; musical Rambards, chimes, glasses and bells. John Dugan managed the annex with four dancing girls.

The first week on the road brought a number of accidents. Ria Duffy fell on opening night, and suffered a broken pelvis and a double fracture of an arm. Jitney Wright, a rider, suffered a broken hand, while on a muddy track during the concert. Bill O'Day, boss canvasman on the big top, suffered crushed toes when a center pole fell on his foot. Jimmie La Rue, boss property man, received a severe

One of the animal cages from the Gentry show during the 1936 season.

scalp wound when a large iron bar fell on his head. Carl Kelley, campfire cook, was burned when his clothing caught fire while cooking.

The show crossed the Ohio River and played Portsmouth, Ohio on May 8, and remained in the Buckeye state for two weeks. The stand in Portsmouth brought a capacity night house. The representative of the *Billboard* visited the show in Hillsboro on May 9. His story offered the following comments. "The management is offering a very pleasing performance in three rings and the directing is done in a speedy fashion by Fred Nelson. The band of 13 pieces is ably directed by John Dusch, who has returned to the big tops after several years' absence. Brydon has the truck equipment of the very best and movements are made in good time. He is planning on having a new and larger top a little later in the season.

"Among the features are Madame and Victor Bedini, and their several splendid horse numbers; the Great Kozaz, on the slack wire; the versatile Mary Miller, presenting cloud swings, wire, aerial loop acts; Rojas Duo, balancing ladder on trapeze; the show's dog, pony and elephant numbers; Perez Trio of acrobats, featuring back drop from pedestal to cushion on ground.

"Harry Taylor heads a very good wild west concert. Danny McPride, Jimmie Thomas, Rube Egan and sev-



Brydon bought some stock paper from Erie Litho; this is a typical design. Actually the title had been changed to Dan Rice by the time the show made Dubuque, Iowa, in June.

eral others offer some good clown numbers. With its fine truck equipment, splendid stock the show is scoring with the parade."

On May 18, in Mansfield, Ohio, the first circus opposition skirmish of the season broke out between the Rice show and Russell Bros. which was booked a week later. The Russell show used newspaper ads, as much as a quarter page captioned, "Russell Bros. coming to play here this season." The Rice show also increased its newspaper space several days in advance of its date. It was the first time in several years that Mansfield had two circuses within a week.

This 1936 Rice picture is actually two photos. The elephants were moved from one end to the other, making it appear that the show had six. Circus World Museum Collection.





Brydon bought a large amount of very old Riverside paper. This design is typical of the turn of the century paper.

Barnett Bros. was also in Ohio at the time, but their route did not cross that of the Rice show.

The show reported later that it had been pioneering new territory in Ohio and got spotty business. Wooster on May 14 was fair at the matinee and near capacity at night. The following day in Ashland the show did straw business.

The Rice Bros. Circus traveled on around 20 trucks. An inventory of the trucks has been made from photos taken on the show during the 1936 season. The motorized units were as follows:

No. 1—Bus-ticket office. (Brydon purchased this unit in 1934 for his International Congress of Oddities.)

No. 7—Bus sleeper. (Lettered with Buck Owen's name, who was not with the show.)

No. 42—Properties (New Chevrolet.)

No. 44—Planks and seats.

No. 46—Semi-Trailer, canvas. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 47—Semi-Trailer, contents unknown. (New Chevrolet.)



Rice Truck No. 69 was the cookhouse. It was an old truck from the Gentry show in 1934.

No. 48—Semi-Trailer, seats and chairs. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 52—Straight truck, contents unknown. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 54—Straight truck, contents unknown. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 69—Cookhouse.

No. 77—Semi-Trailer, side show. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 80—Semi-trailer, elephants. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 82—Two den cage, lions. (From Gentry show.)

No. 84—Two den cage, bears. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 86—Three den cage, tigers. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 87—Semi-trailer, horses. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 90—Semi-Trailer, ponies. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 97—Straight truck, commissary compartment in front, water tank on back. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 99—Straight truck, light plant. (New Chevrolet.)

No. 100—Air calliope.

No.—Straight truck, dog wagon. (From Gentry show.)

No.—Auto trailer, sleeper for band.

The size of the big top is not known but from photographs it appears to have been a 100 foot round top with three 50 foot middles.

The Rice show moved into Indiana on May 25 at Portland, and on into Illinois in Danville on May 31. The June

13 *Billboard* reported that Brydon had changed the title to Dan Rice Circus and that Manuel King, the boy wild animal trainer, had joined the show in Springfield, Illinois on May 10.

During a phone interview on January 2, 1984, Manuel King gave the author the following information, "We had opened and closed with the Jimmie Cole show in Cleveland, Ohio, in the spring of 1936. My father booked some parks and other special dates in Ohio, but we really had nothing solid for the rest of the season. Brydon made contact with us and offered a deal that would allow us to bring our wild animals acts to the Rice show as a feature, to be paid with a percentage of the big show gate. When we arrived on the Rice show Brydon advised that what he really had in mind was that we would present my act as a concert and we would receive a percentage of concert ticket sales. I worked the act in the concert for a few days and then it was moved into the big show performance. We had taken three wild animal acts to the Jimmie Cole show, John Helliott worked six pumas and Bob Conrad worked a different mixed act. We had all of these animals with us, but I don't think the other two acts worked on the Rice show. Our animals were carried in two semi-trailer cages, with the arena mounted on the sides. We had a beautiful Pierce-Arrow bus that had been fitted out as a living unit. J.C. "Chubby" Guilfoyle and his wife were with me at the time also. Our financial relations with Brydon were not too satisfactory, and my





Manuel King is shown in front of his living bus with Chubby Guilfoyle and his wife on a Rice lot in 1936.



Wild animal cage semi cage used to carry the Manuel King act on Rice in 1936.

father did not like the heat the show was taking with all of the grift. I don't think he thought it was a good place for a young boy to be at the time. We stayed with the Rice show for about a month, leaving about the time the show headed into West Virginia early in July. I especially remember the lot the show played in Muscatine, Iowa, on June 18. It was located next to a button factory and I collected a large number of buttons that had been tossed out, taking these home to my mother."

The show played Dubuque, Iowa, on June 20. Newspaper ads for this date featured Manuel King, stating he was the greatest sensation of all time and that he had co-starred with Clyde Beatty. (King had appeared in the motion picture serial *Darkest Africa* with Beatty.) Brydon also had special posters printed featuring Manuel King. The ticket office bus was relettered with the Dan Rice title and Manuel King's name was prominently shown stating: "Dan Rice Circus presents Manuel King World's Youngest and Most Daring Wild Animal Trainer."

Sverre O. Braathen, a prominent circus fan of Madison, Wisconsin, visited the Rice show in Dubuque, and took



This special poster was used in a number of sizes to advertise Manuel King in 1936.

a number of the photos illustrating this article. In a 1968 letter Braathen tells of his visit to the show. "The show was either in ahead of or just behind the Cole show and Cole had

covered all of the Rice paper or torn down most of it. I have the following note on one of my album pictures. This circus began the season under Rice Bros. and shortly before coming to Dubuque took the name Dan Rice Circus. It has nice appearing trucks, old canvas and a fast snappy performance. Feature acts were Mary Miller, aerialist and wire walker, the Bedinis with their dogs and horses and the former Gentry Bros. dogs and ponies. The show had a fast and snappy band. Practically all the Rice paper in the city was buried with a tremendous Cole Bros. opposition billing. [The Cole show played Dubuque about two weeks later on July 6.]

"The show was set up on a lot that had been a dump. It was a very dirty cookhouse. When I saw Brydon I said, 'You are Ray Marsh Brydon are you not.' He said 'I am but I don't often admit it.' I remember a couple wanted to quit the show after the matinee, but could not do so since Brydon would not let them take their trunk or property."

One of the Braathen photos shows a covered wagon lettered "Buck Steele and his Frontier Days Rodeo," indicating that this western performer had joined the show.

Brydon had advertised in the June 13 *Billboard* under the title Dan Rice Circus augmented by Manuel King's Wild Animal Exhibition. In this ad he wanted the following to join the show in Decatur, Illinois, on June 11: "For side show, a real musical act, lady or gent piano-accordionist, genuine troupe of native Hawaiians, or Scotch band. Can also place good snake act. Any good side show act. Can always place oldtime big top jig canvasmen, seat men or riggers. Bill Erickson can

As soon as Manuel King joined the show Brydon at once relettered the ticket wagon with King's name.



place one more billposter and a main street lithographer that can stay out of barrooms."

On August 7 the show was in Westminster, Maryland. E.J. Kelty visited the show and took a group photo. During the month of August the show played dates in Maryland, Delaware and Virginia, moving into Tennessee at Elizabethtown on September 5. By September 24 the Rice show was in Alabama, where it stayed through the month of October.

At some time during late October some of the trucks were sent back to the winter quarters in Jackson, Tennessee, and concluded the regular summer tour. However the "winter show" continued without missing a day. The outdawn version continued to tour until January 23, 1937, closing in Leesville, Louisiana.

A news story appeared in the November 21, 1936 issue of the *Billboard*. This article summed up the season. It read: "Jackson, Tenn., Nov. 14. The Dan Rice Circus will again winter at the fairgrounds here, but the closing date not decided. Show is now in its 33rd week, having made sixteen states and has covered 11,000 miles. But one matinee has been missed, that when the show was forced to play laeger instead of Varian, West Virginia, because of low bridges. One night house was lost at Weirton, West Virginia, because of a heavy storm. There were two blowdowns, Washington, C.H. and Athens, Ohio.

"The show jumped out of drought section of Iowa to good business in West Virginia. No serious mishaps in truck movements except when the show lost both light plants, a 25 and a 15 kilowatt, when light plant was forced off the road at Troy, Alabama. Fire, which started immediately after truck turned over, destroying truck, trailer and plants.

"It was all new equipment, but the loss felt more than any other by the

Madame and Victor Bedini are show in the back yard of the Rice show during the 1936 season.



This large stand of billposting was used by the Dan Rice Circus in Milford, Delaware, for the August 12, 1936 date.

show was that of James "Jitney" Wright and Lee Boyett, who were burned to death. Boyett was a newcomer to the show and worked for Wright in the wild west concert, while Jitney, as he was familiarly known to thousands in show circles opened the season with the Rice circus. The show buried both men.

"The show never lost a performance due to the accident, but worked with gas lanterns three days while waiting on new plants.

"Many plans for enlarging and rebuilding the show are in work. Last Saturday Morrissey and Jessop of U.S. Tent and Awning called on owner Ray Marsh Brydon at Brewton, Ala., and took an order for new canvas, for the entire show, new big top, menagerie, side show, cookhouse and padroom. All tops will be increased in size. Eight new all-steel semi-trailers have been ordered for March delivery. At the same time eight new Chevrolet tractors and six long wheel base trucks will be delivered to Jackson.

"Brydon is now on his way to Rochester, Indiana, for a business visit at the Cole Bros. quarters."

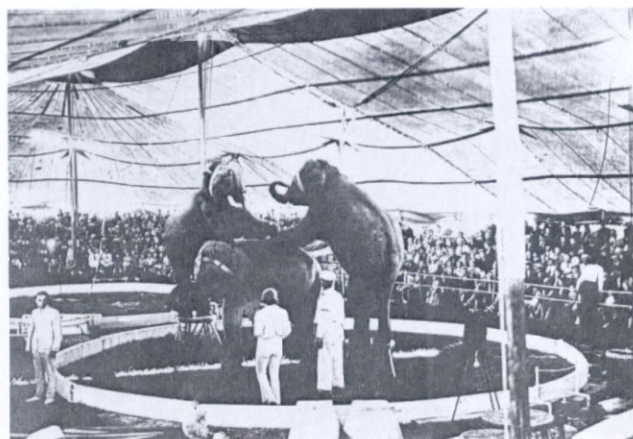
Brydon's last *Billboard* ad appeared in the November 28 issue. The ad reads: "Show property in good shape and suitable for motorized circus. Want animals, camels, sacred oxen, llamas, a zebra, raindeer and any hay eating animals. Want steam calliope, set of Deagan chimes or bells. Small

cross cages, miniature bandwagon. Want to buy—menage horses, football ponies, leaping greyhounds. Can place for balance of this season (which will be plenty long yet) circus acts of all kinds, musicians, make your salary low for a winter time show."

Ted Lavelda (Akeman) joined the show late in November. In a 1979 letter Lavelda tells of his experiences with the Dan Rice show. He writes: "I was only on the Rice show a short time as Freda and I finished the season with Bisbee's Comedians on Thanksgiving Day in 1936. Dan Rice Circus was the title at that time and this was a trimmed down version after the regular season. The Cole Bros. bulls had been on the show during the regular season, so when we came on the bulls had gone back to Rochester, Indiana. Sir Victor and Madam Bedini and their horses had also been on the show, but they were also gone. When we joined the winter show they carried no elephants.

"Del Graham, Sr. and wife, Marie, did a comedy acrobatic act. Del also clowning with Jimmy Thomas, Jimmy McCabe and myself. A young lady, Mary Miller, did about five acts in the big show, such as tight wire, ladder, web and swinging perch. I did a contortion and hand balancing act and Freda did ring contortion. There was a five piece band led by Lee Hinckley, with Ted Cook, Doc Franklin and a

The Ad-Zac elephants leased from the Cole show are pictured during a 1936 performance of the Rice show. Circus World Museum Collection.





This truck from the Gentry show carried the air calliope and was parked at the back door.

couple of others. There was grift in the side show, shell game, three card monte and set spindle. Little Johnny Stevens, Deep Sea Red and Rebel Marchetti were the only grifters' names I can remember. The side show would open by 10 a.m. and was open all day, with a girl show blow-off.

"I don't know the tent sizes, but the big top must have been a 90 with three 40s or 50s. The side show was about 50 by 90. I don't know the number of trucks. I remember a band sleeper (18 bunks) which also slept butchers, a dog truck, there must have been about twelve trucks altogether. About a week after we joined the show, the Aerial Lakes came on—Floyd, Amelia and Georgie. Georgie was a female impersonator and did ladder, web and double traps with Floyd. Floyd and Amelia did carrying perch.

"Wild west paper featured 'Buck Sells' western movie star, but before we came on Jitney Wright had been 'Sells.' It seems that he burned up with a truck that he was driving, so they put a cowboy outfit on the boss prop man and made him the concert star. He learned a little whip manipulating, but didn't do it too well. The after show concert lasted only about

10 minutes, which caused the customers to feel cheated. Decon Albright was also on the winter show.

"The show folded in late January in Southern Louisiana. We had had over a month of rain and the working men all blew. The grifters, butchers and band put up the big top with local help, but finally everything mired down, centers and quarters sank deep in the mud. The winter tour ended and the show headed for Jackson, Tennessee."

Georgie and Floyd Lake appeared on my Fred J. Mack Circus in 1955 and I became well acquainted with them during the short tour of that show. The two remained following the clos-

This photo taken by Sverre Braathen in Dubuque, Iowa, shows the new Dan Rice title after it was relettered in mid-season.



ing and acted as watchmen for the equipment until it was sold to Arthur "Hardtimes" Leonard.

In a letter dated January 2, 1962, Georgie Lake told of his experiences with the Rice show in 1936. He wrote: "Brydon screwed Bays out of the show just like he did Howard King later. The only connection with the Cole show were the leased animals that were never paid for. In the late fall of 1936 the show was moving day by day and we joined in Louisiana around the



The big show band is pictured making an opening in front of the side show on the Dan Rice show in 1936.

A 1936 Rice lot scene showing the big top at the left and the menagerie tent at right.



first of December. The show stayed out until the floods closed us in January of 1937.

"I heard that Jess Adkins had made a personal loan to Brydon to get the show out (which he never repaid). The show made a fortune that year and paid off about half the season. But no matter how much Ray had one day he never had a dime the next. He spent his money on diamonds and chartered planes keeping two or three boys. While we were there we hit some bad spots and the show stopped paying and people started leaving. Whenever we would have a good day he would spend it or stash it away."

By hook or crook Ray Marsh Brydon had toured his circus in 1936 for ten months, one of the longest seasons on record.

The Development of the Railroad Circus

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

Part Four

The Barnum & London Train

The 1882 Barnum train traveled in three sections, the first carrying the horses, tents and laborers, the second the menagerie and the third the sleepers.¹⁷⁶ At the end of the tour another group of rail cars was offered for sale including three stocks, eight flats and two box car sleepers, which were "nearly 46 feet long."¹⁷⁶ The car length and numbers listed in the sale ad suggest some of the 1880 Brill flats may have been included.

In late 1882, Ben Fish, secretary of the Barnum & London organization, told a reporter that the show usually built all of its own cars, but that in 1881 it had to purchase some ready made passenger cars.¹⁷⁷ Trainmaster Byron Rose stated that the show was building two sleepers, four flats and four elephant cars, all sixty feet long, early in 1883.¹⁷⁸

Newspaper ads of 1883 indicated the show traveled on 65 cars in four sections.¹⁷⁹ A total of 68 cars was recorded in the 1883 route book, including nine sleepers. An afterblast in the August 17, 1883 Canton (Oh.) *Daily Repository* placed the train size at four sections totaling 65 cars, whereas a press agent supplied story in the September 12, 1883 Terre Haute, (Ind.) *Evening Gazette* surprisingly reported only 56 cars in two sections, two cars more than the writeup in an 1883 Guelph, Ontario paper.¹⁸⁰

The first detailed Barnum & London train statistics which are considered reliable appeared in the 1884 and 1885 route books. The 1884 book specified a train consist of 32 flats, 15 stocks, 7 elephant cars, 1 baggage car, 10 sleeping cars and 7 advertising cars, for a total of 72 cars.¹⁸¹ The 1885 train comprised 24 flats, 11 stocks, 5 elephant cars, 1 baggage car, 7 sleepers and 4 advertising cars, totaling 52 cars. One hundred wagons

filled the flats both years. On the surface it appears the show incurred a drastic cutback of 20 cars from 1884 to 1895; however, with the wagons per flat car ratio increasing from 3.12 to 4.1, it is probable that longer cars replaced shorter cars in the interim. A change from 45 to 60 foot cars would account for a 30' increase in the ratio, as it does the decrease from 32 to 24 flats.¹⁸²

The 1884 and 1885 route books indicate the number of elephants carried in those years were 36 and 30, respectively, yielding a car loading of 5 to 6 bulls per car. It has not been learned how the early elephant cars were loaded, but it is suspected it was in the same fashion as seventy-two foot metal frame bull cars, which carried twelve elephants. In these later cars, the bulls were loaded in pairs, side by side, all heads facing towards the center doors, the animals backed into position before being secured with chains. In addition to maximizing the use of available space, this method may have been adopted to provide some margin of safety for the men who secured the beasts in the car. Ratioing the lengths of 46 and 72 foot cars gives the shorter cars a capacity four pairs of bulls each. Statistics in Bowser's diary indicated 11 of the 20 bulls on the 1881 show averaged 5663 pounds each, slightly less than the 5816 pounds in Benedict's 1935 study of 63 bulls.¹⁸³ Combining these figures yields a 46 foot elephant car capacity of approximately 45,000 pounds.

Horses are believed to have been loaded crosswise, draft stock packed relatively tight to provide some

A wreck of the second section at Potsdam, New York, on the night of August 22, 1889 took a heavy toll on Barnum & Bailey elephant and stock cars. Most of the cars in these views are identical to the Brill cars built for the Great London in 1880. Pfening Archives.

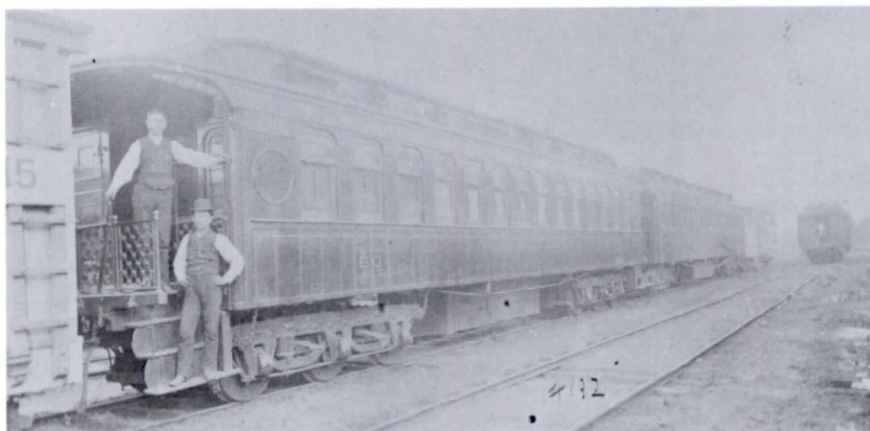
resistance to falling in case of abrupt train motions. Ring stock were separated by barrier gates to prevent them from kicking and biting each other. The barriers also kept the animals on their feet in the event of unexpected train movements. Seventy two foot metal frame cars held 32 baggage horses per car or about 37 ring horses per car. Ratioing the 46 and 72 foot car lengths yields capacities of 20 baggage horses or 24 ring horses per 46 foot car. In 1884 and 1885 the number of horses, ponies and camels carried by the show was 395 and 295, respectively, which yields an average of 26 or 27 animals per vehicle. With an average draft horse weight of about 1500 pounds, the stock car had a nominal capacity of 40,000 pounds.¹⁸⁴

Sixty thousand pound capacity cars were later considered the limit in circus car capacity. The earliest steel cars of 1911 were also rated at 60,000 pound capacity. Ben Wallace ordered the first sixty foot long, 80,000 pound capacity circus cars in 1901, and paid a premium for the added strength.¹⁸⁵ One of the last major wooden circus trains, that of the 1927 Ringling-Barnum show, used 60 foot, 80,000 pound capacity cars.

James A. Bailey withdrew from the active management of the Barnum circus in the fall of 1885, not to return until the 1888 season. In 1886 and 1887 the show was owned by Barnum, Hutchinson, James E. Cooper and W.W. Cole. No major changes in show makeup occurred in these years, the management appearing to have been a caretaker administration.

A report of 79 cars was published in the April 25, 1886 New York *Times*; however, three reviews during the year placed the show on 48 or 50 cars, the route book listing 52.¹⁸⁶ The route book breakdown was 4 elephant cars, 11 stocks, 1 baggage car, 25 flats, 7 sleepers and 4 advertising cars, quite similar to the 1885 makeup. No reports have been found which define





the size or makeup of the 1887 train.

The Barnum & Bailey Train

Bailey returned to the circus business in late 1887. Hutchinson retired and Cooper and Cole were induced to relinquish their holdings, resulting in Barnum and Bailey being equal owners of the Greatest Show on Earth. By 1888 the show reached a sixty four car plateau, including four cars in advance. In 1889 and 1890 only three advertising cars were used, but otherwise 64 cars comprised the Barnum train through most of the 1890's.¹⁸⁷ No breakdown of the train makeup has been found except for an item in the May 31, 1890 *Louisville Courier-Journal* which placed eleven 60 foot long sleepers in the consist.

The Barnum show began to incorporate sixty foot cars into the train as early as 1883, but a number of sources indicate the show continued to use short cars until well into the 1890's. The *New York Dramatic News* of January 2, 1892 remarked the show was on 64 cars, "nearly all sixty feet in length," but the *Chicago InterOcean* of September 1, 1895 was specific, stating the shortest car on the show measured forty six feet long.

Shortly after securing full ownership of the Barnum & Bailey show from Barnum's heirs in September 1894, Bailey instituted a general house-cleaning and reappraisal of the show and winterquarters assets, resulting in a large sale held on December 11, 1894. Among the offerings were three 40 foot stocks, two box cars, four flats measuring from 40 to 60 foot long, a 52 foot long advertising car, a private car, and two sleepers.¹⁸⁸

One 1895 account provided a breakdown of the show's three sections: Section one included seven stocks and three sleepers, an unknown number of flats carrying the wagons which held all of the show's tents, poles and cookhouse equipment. The second section consisted of eleven flats, six stocks and an unknown number of

The finest car in any circus train was usually the owner's car. This 1888 view shows James A. Bailey's private car no. 50. Note that the circus freight car coupled to it on the left differs from the 1880 Brill cars. Circus World Museum.

sleepers. It carried part of the menagerie, the seating, and the wardrobe. The last section was comprised of nine flats for the menagerie cages, a trunk car, four elephant cars and four sleepers, including Bailey's private car.¹⁸⁹

In 1897 there were 62 cars in the train, including 3 elephant cars, 16 stock cars, 31 flats, 7 sleepers, and 4 advance cars. Leaving the U.S. for a European tour in late 1897, the Barnum show train remained behind, the physical size of the cars precluding their use in England and on the continent. Parts of it may have been used to upgrade the Buffalo Bill Wild West and Forepaugh-Sells troupe, the balance remaining at Bridgeport, awaiting the return of the big show in

"Forepaugh's Grand Zoological March," published by F. Welmick of Cincinnati in 1877, carried this engraving on the back cover. A close inspection reveals that planks, set on edge and spanning the

1903.¹⁹⁰ By that time the design of circus cars had been fixed for two decades, and only experienced a major change after another eight years, when the first conventional steel frame cars for circus use were built.

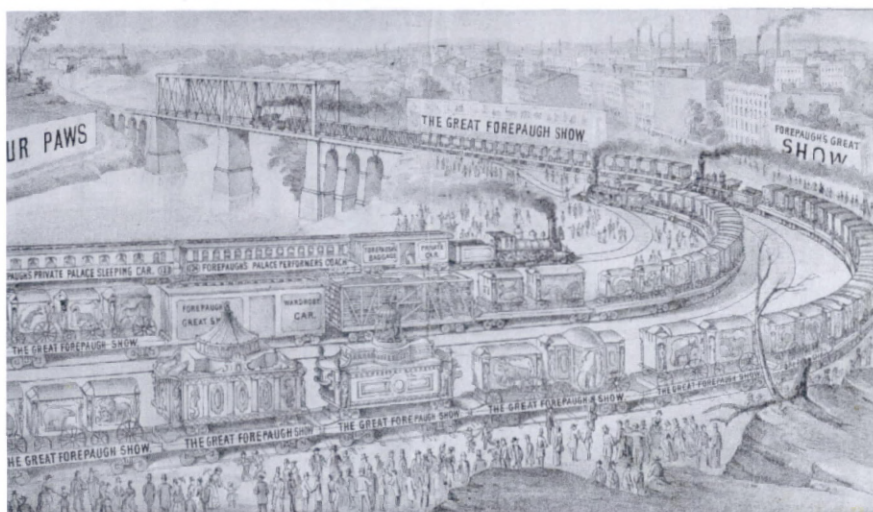
Circus Sleeping Cars

The circus has been identified as an example of democratic principles because its appeal crossed the normal demarcation lines between classes. Closer examination does not verify the claims. For example, seating generally has been divided into general admission and reserved areas, offering patrons of higher financial status the better seats. Even less equality was demonstrated in the lodging provided for those who put on or put up the show.

Lodging of circus employees on the train can be divided into three areas. The performers and management, the top class, generally were given Pullman type compartment accommodations on the better shows. Workmen were given bunks or hammocks in densely packed sleepers. Other laborers slept in stock cars or on flats, close to their areas of responsibility.

Unlike the stock and flat cars, whose designs were modified to suit the needs of the circus, day coaches and sleeping cars owned or leased did not differ materially from their system railroad counterparts. The only innovation with which circuses can be credited, and one of doubtful merit, is the conversion of day coaches into sleeping cars. Circuses usually acquired second hand vehicles from the railroads or sleeping car operators, although on occasion one or two were built new.

width of the car, were used to block the wagons on the gondolas. A similar method of holding the wagons was used on some of the 1880 Great London cars. Pfening Archives.

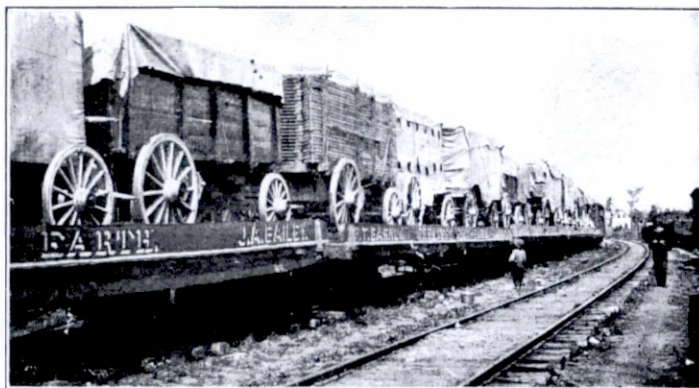


As noted earlier, George Conklin described the earliest sleepers as being day coaches in which wood planks were laid across the seat bottoms and backs to form bedding supports.¹⁹¹ Later workmen's sleepers were also day coaches, from which the seats had been removed, and multiple level berths erected in their place. Apparently the practice was employed in 1872, as Coup noted the show had sleeping cars for the laborers. An early 1873 report stated the Barnum show was converting six passenger cars to sleepers at New Haven and Barnum himself wrote Samuel Clemens on January 19, 1875 advising "I put berths in ordinary passenger cars."¹⁹² The July 9, 1875 St. Paul *Dispatch* noted the 12 passenger cars on the show were fitted with berths or hammocks. In 1880 the show offered to sell one sleeping coach furnished for 90 people and two passenger cars, also outfitted as sleepers.¹⁹³ Two sleepers offered in the 1894 Barnum & Bailey sale catalog had capacities of 56 and 68 people. The converting of day coaches was not confined to the Barnum show. When W.W. Cole auctioned his show in late 1886, he described his three sleepers as coaches without seats.¹⁹⁴

Coup reported passenger coaches cost \$1500 to \$2500 and up, depending upon the quality of their appointments.¹⁹⁵ New day coaches of the late 1860s and 1870s cost between \$4000 to \$5000, a range which did not appreciably change into the 1890's.¹⁹⁶ By acquiring the cars second hand, shows saved one half to two thirds of the cost of a new car, minus remodeling costs.

Not all workers were lodged in the converted day coaches. Elephant men slept in a narrow space above the elephants and camels, and canvas men often slept on the flats, hanging hammocks between the axles of a wagon. The trainmen generally did not sleep during the nightly moves, staying awake in anticipation of being called to duty before the next light of day.

Accommodations for the lesser employees did not improve in the 1890's. The 1891 Barnum & Bailey sleepers were divided into three classes, single men, single women, and married couples. One reporter noted that the chorus girls and men were "packed in their cars like sardines." Instead of the usual two berths in a section, theirs had four. A monitor or mistress was assigned to each car to preserve order. There were four wash basins in both ends of the car and every employee had one hook in a closet for hanging up clothes. All occupants were required to tip the car porter a quarter per week, for which he blacked their shoes each day, took care of the laundry, and made up the berth. Bedding was sent ahead three



Views of pre 1900 loaded circus trains are very rare. This circa 1890 view from George Conklin's book, showing the Bar-

num & Bailey train when both owner's named graced the flats, is one of the earliest known loaded train views.

days and was washed each week.¹⁹⁷ An 1895 account reported that 300 workmen occupied three sleepers, arranged in tiered berths. Typical Pullman cars of the period had a capacity of 50 to 60, or about half the number the show crammed into the cars.¹⁹⁸

Several examples of box cars being converted to sleepers have been found. The Barnum & London show offered to sell two 46 foot long box sleepers in 1882.¹⁹⁹ A particularly tragic consequence of this practice occurred on the 1884 Orton circus. At the head of their seventeen car train was a converted box car which contained bunks for 60 men, arranged in three tiers on both sides. The quarters were so cramped that bunks were erected in front of the doors after they were closed. A rubbish fire inside the car resulted in the death of at least eight men. It was later determined that the only unobstructed egress was a small window in the front end.²⁰⁰

Next to a new advance car, the cost of sleeping cars was the highest of the railroad circus vehicles. The price of new sleepers rose appreciably from the 1860's to the 1890's as the car size increased and their appointments became more elaborate. Prices ranged from \$6000 to \$8000 in the 1860's, rising to the \$14,000 to \$17,000 level in the 1880's, and reaching \$20,000 by the 1890's.²⁰¹ Used sleepers could be acquired at half price, and coach conversion represented a considerable savings for the circus proprietor.

Since most shows lacked the cash required to purchase sleepers, rental arrangements were made with one of the numerous sleeping car operators. Cooper, Jackson & Co. paid \$100 per week for the car they leased from the New York Central Sleeping Car Company in 1882.²⁰² At this rate a show could pay for one car in the course of a season of normal length.

The Wagner Sleeping Car Company supplied one sleeping car to the 1873 Barnum show, and two for the 1876 tour of the Howes Great London cir-

cus.²⁰³ A Pullman Palace Sleeping Car was used on the Great Eastern circus 1873 and 1874.²⁰⁴ A Pullman was used by the Great Australian show in 1877, and the Great London circus bought three second hand Pullman cars in early 1879.²⁰⁵ The Sells show also owned two Pullman cars, according to a report in the March 29, 1879 *Clipper*.

The earliest known view of a circus sleeper is the Palace Sleeping Car of the 1873 John Robinson circus. This vehicle was probably rented from one of the sleeping car companies, possibly Wagner.²⁰⁶

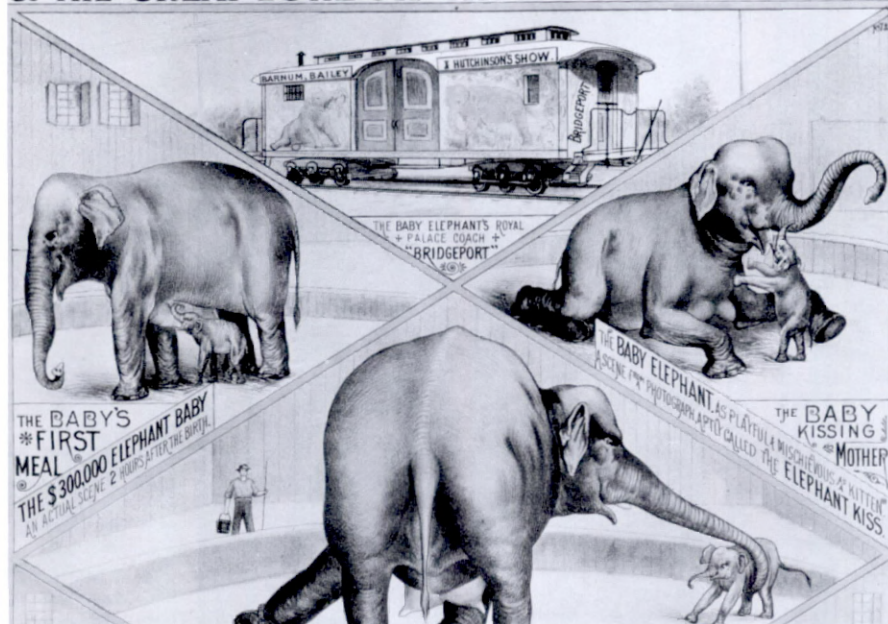
The absence of leased sleeping car company vehicles in circus train consists of the later 1880's and 1890's suggests that leasing was more expensive than remodeling second hand coach cars. As the surplus of used day coaches increased, so did the ease with which they could be acquired by circuses. The bigger shows could afford cars which were relatively new, but some lesser showmen of the 1890's were using cars which had rolled their first mile two or three decades earlier.

The first private car of which notice has been found is the vehicle which housed the Adam Forepaugh family in 1879.²⁰⁷ W.W. Cole's private car was described as having a "kitchen, state-room, etc." when it was offered for sale in 1886.²⁰⁸ A photograph of James A. Bailey's 1888 private car has recently been deposited at the Circus World Museum, this particular vehicle being replaced by a new 65 foot car from the Wason Car Co. in 1892.²⁰⁹ The older car had "a cook and dining room, a refrigerator underneath, brass bedsteads, and a very business like looking office in it, as well as a sitting room." It was always the last car of the train.²¹⁰

Special Purpose Cars

Although circus cars are all unusual, half a dozen extra special cars saw service on the Barnum, and Great

P.T. BARNUM'S GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH & THE GREAT LONDON CIRCUS COMBINED WITH



London circuses. Not surprisingly, all were built in conjunction with the elephant features which dominated the circus scene in the 1880's. Although these cars are out of the main stream of circus car development, they are still significant parts of the story because they indicate how unusual and valuable loads were transported across the country.

The Baby Elephant Car

The only confirmation of the existence of this car is a section of an 1880 Great London two sheet lithograph.²¹¹ It was allegedly constructed to carry the baby elephant Columbia and its mother Hebe, a bull later known as Babe. The car was made to appear as though it was a modified passenger car, denoting the elevated position of the baby elephant. The stated \$8,000 cost was at least a three fold exaggeration, and it is hard to believe an elephant car could have been "padded, upholstered and lined inside with Russian leather." Another vehicle reportedly was used in 1882 to carry Baby Bridgeport, the second elephant born in captivity. It is depicted in a Strobridge one sheet featuring the new baby.²¹² The six wheel trucks of these cars are a carry-over from the passenger car theme, the only bonafided example of stock cars with six wheel trucks being a pair of vehicles on the 1922 Gentry Bros. Circus.²¹³

Jumbo's Palace Car

The most unusual circus car ever constructed was the vehicle used to carry the big African elephant Jumbo from 1882 to 1885. Jumbo was ap-

One section of an 1882 lithograph featuring the baby elephant Baby Bridgeport was devoted to the special car used to transport it. The car is similar to one allegedly used to carry the Great London's baby elephant in 1880.

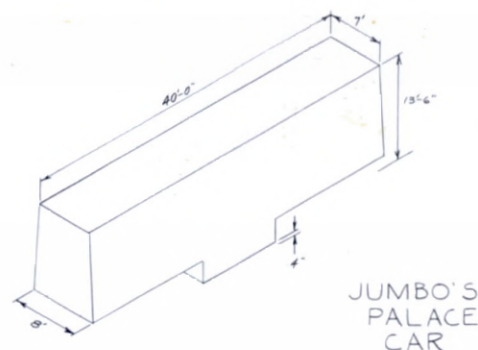
proximately three and one half feet taller than a typical circus Asiatic elephant, and thus required special transportation. No photographs of the car in service are known to exist, and based upon available descriptions of the car, the engravings depicting it are not accurate. The publicity materials which show it may have been inspired by the artistic 1880 Great London litho of the baby elephant car.

W.P. Jolly in his book on Jumbo reported that the car was constructed by the Pennsylvania Railroad, the firm which occasionally performed maintenance work on the Barnum cars.²¹⁴ The car was ready to carry him when the show concluded its Madison Square Garden engagement on April 22, 1882. An eyewitness to Jumbo's first entry into the vehicle recalled that he entered it like a lamb.²¹⁵ Queen was led through the car, in one side and out the other. Jumbo followed, but hesitated in raising his hind feet until the bull hook was applied. By 11:30 p.m. he was loaded, bars were placed across the door opening and Jumbo was ready to take his first rail journey.²¹⁶ A New York Times reporter described the car as being forty feet long, rising thirteen and one half feet from the railhead, and weighing 38,000 pounds. It had a drop center reaching to within four inches of the rail and also possessed slanted sides, the car being eight feet wide at the

bottom but only seven at the top. The entrances were on the sides, similar to those of conventional stock cars. The reporter noted it was painted in several flamboyant colors, the names of Barnum, Bailey and Hutchinson being prominently placed in several locations. Jumbo was loaded lengthwise in the car, which also carried his companion elephant, Queen, and his keeper Matthew Scott in an end compartment.²¹⁷ A corroborating description of the car placed its height at fourteen feet, and the center at six inches from the rail.²¹⁸ The vehicle's unusual shape prompted another reporter to observe that it looked like a large canal boat, the cabins on these vessels commonly having sloped sides.²¹⁹ The car traveled in the third section and could easily be distinguished from the others by its sloping sides, great height, and closeness to the rail. Fifty years after Jumbo began his travels, the Billboard carried a letter noting that the unusual construction of the car and the knowledge that Jumbo was in it precipitated many accidents among the crowds of people gathered to watch it pass.²²⁰

If the height of the 1880 Great London car was typical of elephant cars, Jumbo's car was between eight and fourteen inches taller than the norm; however, its maximum width of eight feet was a foot less than the Great London bull car, a possible concession to its single file loading. It was still a tight fit, however, as Jumbo stepped on William "Elephant Bill" Newman's toes at the first loading and later caught Matthew Scott in a squeeze against the inside wall.²²¹ The forty foot length of the car was considerably less than the sixty foot cars then coming into use, the drop bottom construction possibly prohibiting a longer length. On April 24, 1882 the car in-

Jumbo's car did not resemble the vehicle found in publicity materials. It was even more unusual, having sloping sides and a drop center as shown in this isometric sketch based upon dimensions found in contemporary accounts. There was no mistaking which car housed the great Jumbo when the Barnum & London train passed by.



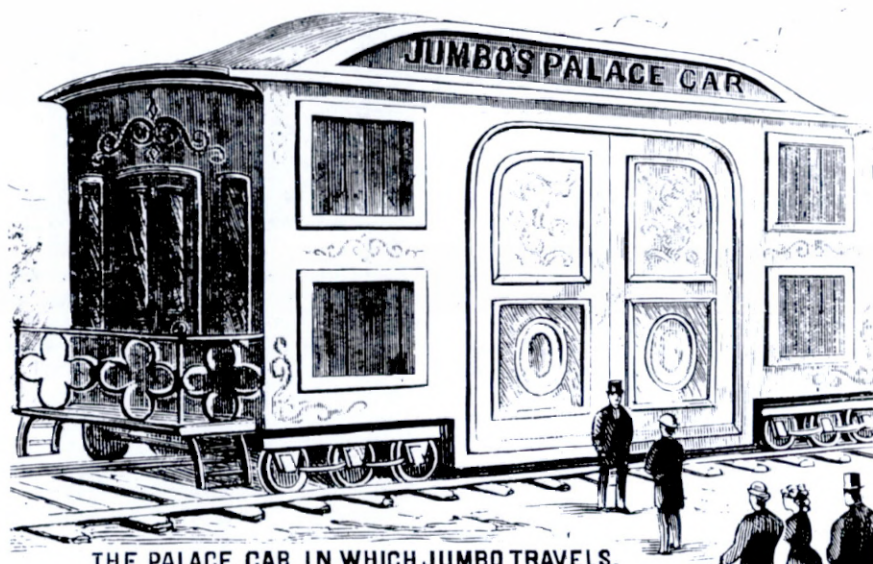
curred a running gear failure, the repair work being performed during the week's stand at Philadelphia.²²²

It was not uncommon for elephant cars to be left behind when restrictive bridge or tunnel clearances prevented their passage. No reports of the Jumbo car remaining behind or being re-routed have been found, presumably the result of astute and restricted routing or constructing the car within accepted clearances.²²³ Jumbo's last trip in the car was made the night of September 14, 1885, from Chatham to St. Thomas, Ontario. The following night the clown elephant Tom Thumb was trussed up in it, its broken right rear leg in a splint as a secondary result of the mishap which claimed Jumbo's life. The car arrived at Bridgeport on September 22.²²⁴ Long-time circus man Harry Parkhurst saw the car in the yard at Bridgeport during the winter of 1893-1894 and noted its unusual height and construction, the fading name of Jumbo still visible on the sides.²²⁵ Close inspection of a post 1918 Bridgeport quarters shot reveals what is believed to be the Jumbo car, minus its trucks and set on the ground in the southeast corner of the property, a storage area. The identity of the car is established by its unique sloped sides. The car was abandoned when Ringling-Barnum moved to Sarasota and was demolished when the quarters property was cleared in the early 1930's.

The White Elephant Car

The white elephant war of 1884 gathered more free publicity for two attractions of dubious merit than any other event in circus history. While the Barnum show conducted a sincere search in the Far East for the legendary beast, and eventually exhibited an elephant which may have been sold to the show as the genuine article, Forepaugh countered with a sand-papered and whitewashed bull which poked fun at the profound claims made about the Barnum bull.

Although the Forepaugh animal, the "Light of Asia," apparently traveled in a conventional bull car, the Barnum show's white elephant, Toung Taloung, allegedly traveled in Burmese splendor. A new car, measuring sixty feet long and mounted on six wheel trucks with "unusually elastic springs," was built. It was reportedly divided into three sections, one for the bull which was padded, a second to act as a place to worship for the accompanying Burmese priests, and a third to act as their sleeping compartment. The vehicle was decorated in a style characterized as "Burmese impressionist," the color yellow predominating, scenes from the elephant's life and Burmese culture being the subject of the exterior paintings.²²⁶ Based upon these des-



To excite the minds of young and old alike, Jumbo's Palace Car was depicted in advertising materials as having glazed sides through which the famous beast could be seen as he passed by on his

travels. In reality, the show managers took special precautions to shield their star attraction from preying eyes. This engraving is from an 1882 courier in the author's collection.

criptions it appears to have been a typical system baggage or combination car with an elaborate exterior paint job. The only confirmation of the car's existence which has been located is found in a letter which George M. Bates, a Barnum show elephant hand in the 1880's, sent to the *Billboard* in 1923. Bates noted that the elephants Gipsy and Queen loaded in the white elephant car in 1885.²²⁷

The Jumbo Hide and Skeleton Cars

Two of the most awkward attractions ever featured by an American circus were the mounted hide and skeleton of Jumbo, transported around the U.S. by the Barnum show from 1886 to 1888.²²⁸ The fixed height of these exhibits, on the order of twelve feet, prohibited their transportation by conventional rail car, and the show arranged for the construction of two special vehicles to perform this duty.²²⁹ To carry the mountings between the train and the lot, the show had two open frame wagons built, equipped with elevating mechanisms which allowed their cargoes to be lowered into wells in the railroad cars on which they were loaded.²³⁰ George Bates, the source of this information, also noted that the car measured twelve feet high inside, suggesting it was a semi enclosed vehicle rather than a flat car. The hide car and its load were weighed at Ottawa, Canada, probably on September 2, 1887, when it was learned their combined weight was 44,000 pounds. Due to the car's abnormal size, it was necessary to leave it behind on several occasions in West

Virginia and Kentucky because it would not fit through the tunnels on the railroad.²³¹

Loading Equipment & Terminology

Until further research discloses new data on the adoption and development of the end loading method, speculation will have to substitute for fact. It is logical to assume that the first attempt to load a circus wagon onto flat cars was from the side, and not the end, of an adjacent freight dock, a laborious task which took much man handling. The short and light baggage wagons of early railroad shows could be readily loaded and positioned on the flats, but long and heavy parade vehicles could not be moved onto the car without considerable effort, nor could they be loaded crosswise. The weight of larger wagons may have also prohibited them from some freight platforms.

The size of pre 1872 gilley type railroad circuses did not require the development of a quicker method of loading the cars. The proprietors of these shows accepted the limitations of standard railroad car loading practices. Their downsized shows were shifted from the train to the lot by a labor intensive process which did not interfere with the performance schedule or train movements.

Coup took the opposite approach. Inspired by the larger profits which could be obtained by a large show moving by rail between population centers, he rejected the limitations imposed by the gilley type format, and created an organized flatcar operation which could move a large show from

the train to the lot almost as quickly as a much smaller gilly show. There were two primary elements of this revolutionary change. The first was that the majority of equipment was carried on the wagons to avoid re-handling of materials from box car to dray wagon. The second part was the employment of a procedure which allowed the wagons to be unloaded or loaded in the shortest period of time. It was this need which led to the eventual adoption of end loading and unloading procedures.

Development of the end loading method for filling the flats required a 90° change in car loading philosophy. Railroad cars in general were designed to be loaded from the side, a logical operation which avoided the need to invade the dangerous area defined by the tracks. Freight platforms beside the tracks rose up to the level of box car and flat car beds to provide a ready access and ease of movement for articles between the cars and the platform.

A recent search of the U.S. patent records by the author revealed no patents issued to Coup or anyone else for the system which consisted of the combined application of a number of simple machines. Patents relating to car loading procedures or devices generally involve the usual side loading approach. The only patent which remotely related to wagon loading is an 1873 issue concerning the pulling of a wheeled plow across the top of a string of flat cars to remove earthen materials from the car platforms. In this patent rails were used to bridge the car gaps, and the pull rope was located over the top of the car centerline.²³²

The end loading method can be described as the pulling of a wagon from the ground to the top of the flatcars over a pair of inclined planes by means of a rope pulled by horses. To unload the flats, inclined planes were again used. The wagon was pulled into the unloading position at the end of the flat by a team of horses using a hook rope. The descent of the wagon down the runs was controlled by another rope which was connected to the wagon by means of a hook and wound around a snubber post affixed to the side of the car. The paying out of the rope was controlled by a man who used the friction between the rope and the post to offset the gravitational force exerted on the wagon.

The inclined planes on which the wagons ascended to the flats from the ground were called "runs."²³³ Coup used the term, and it appears in various accounts of 1879, 1880, and 1882.²³⁴ Two reporters, in 1880 and 1881, referred to runs as "skids," the term more commonly associated with crossover plates.²³⁵ The 1875 Barnum sale catalog listed "6 run plank for



After Jumbo's death, his special car was relegated to the Bridgeport winter quarters where it survived for almost fifty years. This rare view from the 1920's

shows Jumbo's car in the southeast corner of the quarters, minus its trucks and set on the ground, being used for storage. Albert Conover Collection.

loading cars," suggesting the early runs were constructed of wood. When the 1873 Forepaugh show, still an overland circus, used such an arrangement to unload its rhino den from a system car, one of the planks broke, costing the life of a laborer.²³⁶ Steel runs were a later innovation, allegedly the invention of Ernie Houghton.²³⁷

The runs of the 1895 Barnum & Bailey show were described by one viewer as being thirty feet long, sixteen inches wide and four inches thick. Constructed of wood, there were four inch high curbs on the runs to prevent the wagon from slipping off the edge.²³⁸ Photographs taken after 1900 show little metal wheels attached to the sides to make loading and unloading of the runs from the flat an easier task.

Once in place, the runs were supported by saw horses and large wood blocks, the entire arrangement leveled by the use of wood plank shims. The cars which were normally used to mount the runs became known as "run cars" for obvious reasons, but this term has yet to be found in contemporary accounts.

To facilitate the passage of wagons from one flat to another required the bridging of the gap between two adjacent cars.²³⁹ Wood planks were probably tried first, but these were quickly replaced by metal members. The 1872 Barnum cars were fitted with metal extensions to cross the gap, similar to the crossover plates on the 1879 Batchellor & Doris flats, which were supported by projecting bars. By 1880 both the Great London and the Barnum circuses employed removable crossovers.²⁴⁰ The Great London ad in the October 16, 1880 *Clipper* referred to the crossovers as "skids," but the 1888 John B. Doris auction list simply called them iron plates.

One fixture used by the railroad circuses was already in the tool box of the overland circus. The hookrope was a long stout rope with a stong metal hook affixed to one end. Conklin recorded the use of these ropes to extricate wagons which were stuck in mudded roads, creek beds, etc.²⁴¹ Railroad shows used hook ropes to pull the wagons over a different ob-

stacle, the inclined plane from the ground to the top of the flat car.

None of the reporters who covered the unloading of flats in the 1870's or 1880's remarked upon the use of snubber posts. The device may have had a nautical origin, where it was employed to secure the hawsers used to moor a vessel.²⁴² In the circus application, the hook rope was wound around the post, or posts, in a spiral fashion, employing the friction between the two to provide a means to retard the descent of the wagon. The earliest view of a snubber post is found in the 1880 photo of the new Great London flat car, which shows it to have been a turned fitting, consisting of two mated cones. The center necked design kept the rope from riding off either end of the post as it was paid out. Some later posts had a cylindrical body with top and bottom retainer plates. Snubber posts were used both singly and in tandem, affixed to the car by means of a pair of pockets which received the stem of the post.

To reduce the amount of force necessary to pull heavy wagons up the runs, a snatch block was used in conjunction with the hookrope. A snatch block consisting of a pulley mounted in a block to which a hook was affixed, was already a circus fixture, employed in the raising of bale ring type tents. For loading wagons, the block was hooked to the wagon, the rope passing through it, one end of the rope fastened to a ring on the flat and the other end to the horses. The use of the block halved the required pull force but doubled the distance the horses had to walk. Snatch blocks and other pulleys for tent use were listed in the 1875 Barnum sale catalog. The Great London ad in the November 27, 1880 *Clipper* offered ropes, pulleys and blocks with a set of flats. Photographs of the device are not found until the 1930's.

After a wagon reached its traveling position, it had to be fixed in place to prevent subsequent movement. Although chains and ropes may have been used to secure the wagons to the flats during some early overland show rail jumps, confirmation of the practice has yet to be found. By 1880 two methods were in use to secure the

wagons. In one, small wooden wedges, called chocks, were inserted in front of and behind the wagon's wheels to keep it from rolling. The word chock was commonly used to describe any wedge shaped block employed to retard motion.²⁴³

The earliest written record of the term chocks is found in a Great London ad in the November 27, 1880 *Clipper*. An earlier offering in the October 16, 1880 *Clipper* misspelled the word chocks (sic). Although the Great London undoubtedly used the chocks it offered for sale, the Worcester (Ma.) *Aegis and Transcript* of May 15, 1880 indicated the wagons were blocked on the flats by bars placed across the top of the cars. The report did not clarify if the bars were in conjunction with the chocks or simply passed in front of, or through, the wagon's wheels. The 1888 John B. Doris sale list included baggage wagon and cage chocks.

By the 1900's the chock was not simply a wood wedge, but a trapezoidal shaped block to which a side retaining piece was affixed. To prevent the chocks from moving once they were positioned, two sharp pointed bolts protruded from the underside of the block.

The design of circus wagons changed with the advent of continuous rail travel. Rail travel allowed an increase in the size of the wagons, permitting heavier loads to be carried by each vehicle. The larger diameter carriage wheels formerly necessary to negotiate the nation's rudimentary roads were replaced by smaller diameter wheels having a wider tire width. This move satisfied the need for stronger wheels to support increased loads, while simultaneously holding the wagon height to a minimum to clear railway obstructions.

Two pieces of hardware were added to wagons specifically for loading purposes. At the bottom four corners of the wagon body, and occasionally in the middle of the sides, rings were affixed to provide a suitable attachment

point for the hookrope's hook. Probably because they resembled rings placed on farm bulls, and generally served the same purpose, they were called "bull rings." The earliest photographic documentation of their existence is an 1894 shot of several Barnum & Bailey cages.²⁴⁴ The 1883 Barnum & London tableau dens had bull rings by the time they arrived in England in 1898, but they appear to have been retrofits. The rings served a second purpose on the lot, providing a stout attachment for the hookup of extra teams to dislodge a wagon when it became mired in the mud. Prior to the adoption of bull rings, the hookrope would have been engaged around an axle or possibly the metal strapping which stabilized the front gear's top cross-members. At least one photo exists showing the hookrope attached to the hook at the front end of the wagon tongue.

The men who guided the wagons up the runs and cross the flats, called "polers," had a dangerous occupation. Any imbalance of forces on the wagon's front wheels, due to debris on the path or other causes, resulted in the wagon tongue wiping to one side or another, with devastation effects if it caught the poler. To prevent this from happening, "tongue chains" were affixed to the front of the wagon tongue's receptacle, the hound. Tongue chains are first seen in loading views taken between 1900 and 1910, but as often as not, they were not used. Whether this was due to laziness, a desire to live dangerously, or simply a matter of carelessness, is not known.

Razorback is the name which has been used to designate the men who loaded the trains. The term is not

Two of the bull cars built to transport the Barnum & Bailey show in Europe used a drop bottom arrangement to meet the restrictive European rail clearances. This view shows a big male tusker entering one of these cars on the continent. Pfening Archives.

found in pre-1900 sources, but Jake Posey, whose circus career commenced in 1880, reported that the words "Raise your backs" were shouted by the train bosses when the crew was shifting cross cages into position. With one man at each wheel, the command synchronized the effort to turn the cage ninety degrees. Posey's anecdote took place on the 1881-1883 Sells brothers circus, shortly before the show featured a 50 cage menagerie consisting primarily of short cross cages.²⁴⁵

The bosses' instructions were reportedly contracted into razorbacks to designate the men. No affiliation has been found between the circus' use of the term and its more common application to describe certain wild hogs, the latter usage being recorded in the literature as early as 1867.²⁴⁶ In 1897 the term was defined by the Wabash (In.) *Tribune* as the men who drove the stakes and erected the tents, apparently confusing it with the term roustabout.²⁴⁷

No contemporary accounts have been found which use the term gilley to define the unloading and transportation of circus properties from rail car to lot largely by the use of manual labor. The earliest occurrence of the term is found in the J.J. Jennings' 1886 volume, *Theatrical and Circus Life*, where it was used to describe a stupid person or simpleton.²⁴⁸ Perhaps such a mentality suited the laborious tasks which such shows required of their employees, utilizing obedient physical strength more than mental prowess. In his memoir, Coup noted that some circus men referred to their patrons as "gillies."²⁴⁹

The use of the term gilley to designate a particular type of railroad circus operation is first encountered in the *Billboard* after the advent of the railroad carnival in the late 1890's. Similar to the railroad circus, these shows existed in two basic forms, one of which was the full scale railroad operation in which everything was loaded from the train in wagons. The other format involved the use of manual labor to unload the equipment onto dray wagons which carried the materials to the lot. When a railroad carnival made the transition from the latter to the former type of operation it was regarded as a step upwards in the industry hierarchy, and merited mention in the *Billboard*. We suspect the term gilley was applied in a derogatory fashion to these shows, an outgrowth of its earlier connotations.

The October 11, 1913 *Billboard* defined the term gilley wagon as "A town wagon hired or leased to haul stuff." This definition was one of many given in an article titled "Circus Dictionary," which appeared in the circus section.



Epilogue and Acknowledgements

This is the final installment of an attempt to explain the technical development of the circus train. The next major advance in show train design was the adoption of steel frame cars which began in 1911. The scope and significance of this change requires additional research.

This paper has generated considerable reader interest, and the author gratefully acknowledges those who have provided supplementary information. Any additional comments, additions, or corrections will be appreciated. Adequate new material has already been discovered to justify a supplement which will appear in a future *Bandwagon*.

It is the author's hope that a model builder will construct a set of the Great London cars which can be compared side by side with models of 70 and 72 foot cars. The models would substitute for a comparison of the actual vehicles which is obviously not feasible at this date.

The paper has been enriched by the valuable contributions of many people. The author wishes to extend his thanks to Albert Conover, Richard Flint, Greg Parkinson, Frank Mara, Fred D. Pfening Jr., Fred D. Pfening III, John Polacsek, Gordon Potter, Richard J. Reynolds III, Stuart Thayer, and John H. White, Jr. for their assistance. The Circus World Museum Library, under the guidance of Bob Parkinson, provided several documents of particular importance. A most deserving tribute is due Eric P. Whorral, who painstakingly examined the 10,000 photographs in the Brill Collection to assure no additional circus car photographs escaped our attention.

Footnotes

175. Lewiston (Me.) *Evening Journal*, July 11, 1882.
176. *Clipper*, November 11, 1882, p. 557.
177. *New York Morning Journal*, November 28, 1882.
178. Bridgeport (Ct.) *Daily Standard*, January 10, 1883.
179. Jackson (Mi.) *Daily Citizen*, June 13, 1883.
180. Updated clipping, Circus World Museum.
181. A report in the June 3, 1884 Bridgeport (Ct.) *Standard* differed slightly giving the train makeup as 7 elephant cars, 13 stocks, 1 baggage, 38 flats and 9 sleepers in 3 section.
182. The different flat car counts in 1884 may be the result of mid season receipt of longer cars after the Bridgeport stand.
183. Henry E. Bowser Diary, Fred D. Pfening III collection; Francis G. Benedict, *The Physiology of the Elephant* (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1936).
184. The loading practices employed with 72 foot steel frame elephant and horse cars were supplied by Gordon Potter.
185. *Billboard*, February 9, 1901, p.9; Wallace's

- three flats and stock car were supplied by the Illinois Car and Equipment Company of Chicago. Peru (In.) *Daily Chronicle*, April 24, 1901.
186. Ft. Wayne (In.) *Daily News*, July 1, 1886; Canton (Oh.) *Evening Repository*, June 21, 1886; Lima (Oh.) *Daily Democrat Times*, July 1, 1886.
187. The figures in the show's route book for these years are confirmed by reports in various newspapers and periodicals.
188. Sale catalog, Pfening Archives.
189. Cleveland Moffett, "How The Circus Is Put Up and Taken Down," *McClure's Magazine*, V, 1, pp. 49-61.
190. The train used by the show during its European tour is the subject of Chris Leigh's "Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth," in *Model Railway Constructor* (British) Vol. 50, 594, October 1983, pp. 592-598. A second article will follow with model plans for these unusual cars.
191. Conklin, p. 83.
192. *Saturday Evening Post*, April 14, 1900, p. 948; *New York Times*, March 22, 1873; *Saxon Letters*, p. 190.
193. *Clipper*, November 27, 1880, p. 287.
194. *Clipper*, November 20, 1886, p. 576.
195. *Saturday Evening Post*, May 12, 1900, pp. 1056-1957.
196. White, pp. 81, 107, 659. White's authoritative volume is indispensable for analyzing the development of passenger cars.
197. *Good News*, p. 1020.
198. Moffett, p. 60.
199. *Clipper*, November 11, 1882, p. 557.
200. *New York Times*, August 30, 1884.
201. White, pp. 239, 243, 248, 659.
202. Richard E. Conover note file. Albert Conover collection.
203. 1873 Barnum show route book; ad in Jackson (Mi.) *Daily Citizen*, July 22, 1876.
204. *Clipper*, August 29, 1874, p. 175. The car's occupants presented the Pullman conductor with a watch and chain worth \$425 for his two years service.
205. *Clipper*, April 14, 1877, p. 23; February 8, 1879, p. 367.
206. The photo was printed in Gil Robinson, *Old Wagon Show Days* (Cincinnati: Brockwell Co., 1925), facing page 132.
207. *Clipper*, August 16, 1879, p. 167.
208. *Clipper*, November 20, 1886, p. 576.
209. *New York Dramatic News*, January 23, 1890, p. 10; February 6, 1890, p. 10.
210. *Good News*, P. 1020.
211. Ray Dirgo collection.
212. *Bandwagon*, XIV, 2, p. 14.
213. For a photo of these cars see *White Tops*, XXXV, 6, p. 3.
214. W. P. Jolly, *Jumbo* (London: Constable, 1976), p. 133. Jolly did not cite his source, nor has our search uncovered it.
215. John B. Estelle's recollections are in *Billboard*, January 20, 1923, p. 77.
216. *New York Times*, April 23, 1882.
217. *Ibid*.
218. Canton (Oh.) *Daily Repository*, August 17, 1883.
219. *New York Tribune*, April 23, 1882.
220. *Billboard*, June 18, 1932, p. 27.
221. *New York Times*, April 23, 1882; Route Book, May 22 entry.
222. 1882 Route Book.
223. A letter in the February 6, 1932 *Billboard* claimed all of the tunnels in the U.S. and Canada were measured prior to the construction of the car, a task likely performed only in the mind of the letter's writer.
224. Entry in Henry E. Bowser diary, Fred D. Pfening III collection.
225. *Billboard*, May 21, 1932, p. 27.
226. *New York Daily Tribune*, January 20 and 24, 1884; *Morning Journal*, January 24, 1884.
227. *Billboard*, September 15, 1923, p. 80.
228. See the author's account of this feature in *Bandwagon*, XXVII, 1, cover and p. 3.
229. *Clipper*, October 3, 1885, p. 452.
230. Another circus feature of great fixed height, Adam Forepaugh's 1878 Gem Bossed Car of Freedom, was carried on a flat car which had recessed pockets into which the wagon's wheels dropped. The car is described in the Worcester (Ma.) *Gazette*, July 24, 1879.
231. *Billboard*, September 15, 1923, p. 80.
232. U.S. Patent 138,476, issued on May 6, 1873 to G.S. Caldwell, whose application was filed September 4, 1872.
233. Knight, III, p. 2003 defined run as "A plank laid down to support rollers in moving buildings and other heavy objects. Also as a track for wheelbarrows."
234. Worcester (Ma.) *Evening Gazette*, July 24, 1879; *Clipper*, October 16, 1880, p. 235; Lewiston (Me.) *Evening Journal*, July 11, 1882.
235. Worcester (Ma.) *Aegis & Transcript*, May 15, 1880; *Good News*, p. 1020.
236. *Clipper*, August 9, 1873, p. 15.
237. Houghton started in the business on the 1881 W.W. Cole circus, subsequently serving on Walter L. Main, Pawnee Bill and Al G. Barnes. In addition to steel runs, possibly conceived as an adjunct to the Pawnee Bill-Buffalo Bill show's pioneering use of the modern steel cars in 1911. Houghton also claimed to be the inventor of continuous gennels and the secret feed box arrangement in stock cars. He was believed to be the first man to move a show without body poles, and allegedly devised a means to take the weight of the horses' harness off their backs during transit.
238. Moffett, p. 58. The length is believed to be exaggerated.
239. Knight, II, p. 1740 has illustrations of the crossover pieces used with passenger coaches.
240. Worcester (Ma.) *Evening Gazette*, May 25, 1880; Worcester (Ma.) *Aegis & Transcript*, May 15, 1880.
241. Conklin, p. 16.
242. Knight, III, pp. 2231-2232.
243. Knight, I, p. 543.
244. Photo in the Old Dartmouth Historical Society.
245. "Reminiscences of Jake Posey," *Bandwagon*, June 1950, pp. 9-11. See Richard E. Conover, "The Sells Brothers Bandchariot and Their 50 Cage Menagerie," *Bandwagon*, X, 3, pp. 14-17.
246. Wm. A. Craigie, ed., *A Dictionary of American English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), III, p. 1092, indicates razorback was used to designate the hogs as early as 1867.
247. Quoted in the Miami Country (In.) *Sentinel*, April 10, 1897.
248. The Jennings reference is on page 281. He spelled it gillie, not gillye. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, IV, p. 164, also spells it gillie, the term generally applied to as servant or "gopher."
249. Forrest Crissey ed., "With the Big Show," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 12, 1900, p. 1056

FRANCIS KITZMAN

Francis Kitzman, long time bill car manager, died on May 23, 1984, in Miami, Florida.

Kitzman went with the advance of the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows in 1917 and retired in 1965 after heading the advance of the Carson & Barnes Circus.

The Value of Circusiana and the Phillips Poster Auction

By Fred D. Pfening III

Is a single circus lithograph, albeit a beautiful 1889 Barnum and Bailey twelve sheet, worth \$5400? Could a Buffalo Bill one sheet sell for \$2800? Would anyone pay \$2000 for a 1918 Ringling clown bill? Does Gargantua still have the box office clout for a poster with his likeness to sell for \$1000? Have all of us who have collected circus material over the years inadvertently accumulated small fortunes in our basements and attics? The answer to the first four questions is yes. The answer to the last is, well, yes and no.

In one of the most remarkable events in the history of circus collecting, the Circus World Museum research center auctioned 280 of its posters at the Phillips Gallery in New York City on May 6, 1984. Contrary to some published reports, all the lithographs were duplicates. In fact, with the exception of three or four, all were at least third copies. Virtually all the venerable titles were represented: Barnum and Bailey, Ringling, Ringling-Barnum, Forepaugh, Forepaugh-Sells, John Robinson, Sells Floto, Al G. Barnes, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells Bros., Buffalo Bill, 101 Ranch, and many others. The oldest offering was from 1889, and the most recent from 1945 with about sixty percent before 1920. The overwhelming majority were one sheets, although a few half sheets, two sheets, and window cards were available. A twelve sheet was the sole big bill. Strobridge executed about ninety percent of the posters, the rest coming from U.S. Litho, Erie, Enquirer, Riverside, and others.

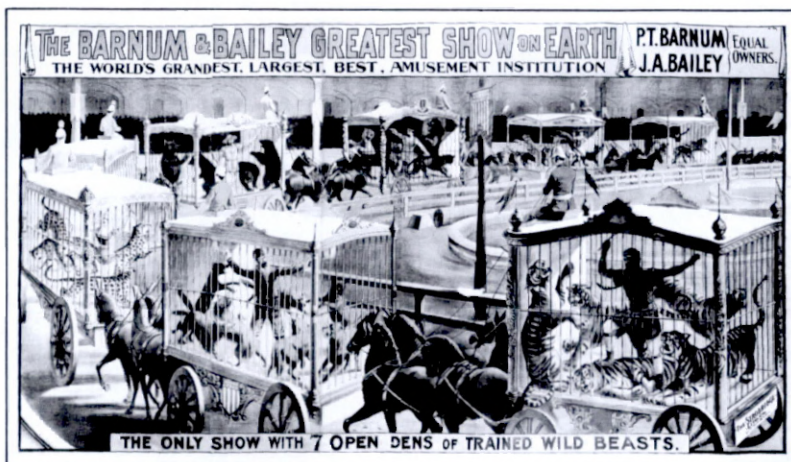
Jack Rennert, the auction's consultant who edited an excellent, fully illustrated catalogue, called the event "a unique opportunity." It was indeed the finest group of circus paper ever offered at auction, and one of the best collections ever made available. Most of the bills were estimated to sell for between \$300 and \$500 with the lowest priced item estimated at \$100, and the most expensive at \$2500. Estimates are published before auctions to give bidders an indication of what range of prices to expect for each lot.

The market value of collectables, established by both auction results and dealer lists, rises and falls as a result of many factors including the rate of inflation, availability, changes in popular taste, and demand. For example, in the late 1970s the value of stamps and coins increased tremendously because they were considered

This 1889 Barnum and Bailey twelve sheet sold for more than any other single piece of circusiana ever has. Its price: \$5400.

a good hedge against inflation which in turn increased demand as non-collectors entered the market. As inflation dropped in the early 1980s, their value dropped, in some cases by half, and today many unhappy people hold stamps and coins worth much

Why is this 1929 Hagenbeck Wallace clown smiling? Perhaps because he sold for \$1000. It was a record for anything printed at Erie Lithograph.



less than they paid for them. Likewise, some pieces of art fetched higher prices twenty-five or even fifty years ago than today, while others have increased many fold in a generation.

The value of circus posters has increased dramatically in the last decade as the result of increased demand more than any other reason. During that period a wide range of people whose primary interest is poster collecting or the decorative arts, and not circuses, began buying them. On the other hand, the prices of programs, route books, couriers, and other kinds of circusiana have barely kept up with inflation, the result of their limited appeal to all but show aficionados. After all, no one frames a route book, and puts it on the rec room wall. Circus enthusiasts make up only part of the market for posters, while they are virtually the entire market for most other types of material.

A curious situation has existed with circus lithographs for the last few years. A two tiered market has developed in which circusiana dealers, who for the most part sell only to circus fans, may offer a poster for a fraction of the price a lithograph dealer asks for the same item. Beyond the price differences, circusiana dealers use different criteria in setting prices than non-circusiana dealers or auction house bidders. For example, to the circusiana dealer and collector, the age of a bill is important; a lithograph from 1890 is worth more than one from 1930 simply because it is older. Likewise, a poster with a big name act is generally worth more than one depicting some lesser light, and a litho from a show print house whose crea-

tions are less available than another's is more valuable. To the non-specialist in circusiana, the artistic merit and graphic appeal are by far the major factors in determining value.

The Phillips auction clearly reflected strong market demand. Almost half the lots sold at or above their high estimate with only seven not reaching the minimum amount necessary for a sale to take place. The average lot price was \$400. It was a happy day in Baraboo as the sale totaled \$112,100, not including the buyers' ten percent premium which went to Phillips. The Circus World Museum will net out about \$80,000 which will be deposited in its library and research center endowment. Begun last year, the endowment's sole purpose is to fund the museum's superb library with the eventual goal of placing it on a financially independent basis. The money from this auction, like the contributions the fund has received, goes into a special account from which only the interest is used, and then only for the library.

The auction set many records—starting with the one for the most money changing hands in one day over circusiana. The \$5400 winning bid for a Barnum and Bailey twelve sheet was the most ever paid for a single circus collectable. A Barnum and Bailey two sheet portrait bill brought \$1800, and a Buffalo Bill one sheet had a price tag of \$2800. A Buffalo Bill half sheet closed at \$1300, and perhaps most incredible of all, a Ringling-Barnum portrait window card went for \$225. All were the highest amount ever paid for their size. Only the imagination limits the number of other records as new highs were reached for virtually every title, every subject, every printer, and every year between 1889 and 1945. Could the old-time billposters ever suspected that they were pasting gold on farmers' barns, and in merchants' windows?

Lithographs which were desirable to other specialized collectors' groups went high. A Barnum and Bailey poster showing the side show's magic acts sold for \$1100, and two Barnum and Bailey lithos tying in their high dive act with New York's Coney Island brought \$1200 and \$800. Virtually all bills featuring clowns went over their estimates. The famous "The Children's Favorite Clown," Ringling one sheet had a winning bid of \$2000, and a 1929 Hagenbeck-Wallace clown portrait cost \$1000.

The public's fascination with western Americana, particularly Buffalo Bill, was clearly in evidence. Every Cody poster sold for much more than its pre-auction high estimate with seven of them going for over \$1000 each. Lithographs from Pawnee Bill, 101 Ranch, and the Tom Mix Circus also went high, and thirteen of the

eighteen offerings in the wild west section exceeded their high estimate.

The dollar amount of some winning bids made little sense, and appears to have been the result of two bidders, both with an extraordinary interest in a particular piece, pushing up the price after the others had dropped out. For example, six of the Barnum and Bailey series of Columbus spec lithos were put on the block. All were in the same general condition, all were one sheets, all were from 1892, and all were of approximately equal artistic merit. Yet, two sold for \$150, two for \$175, one for \$450, and one for \$475. Two posters featuring ships were included. One was used by Sells Bros. in 1892, the other by Cole Bros. in 1936. The Sells piece was in better condition, and was both artistically and technically superior to the Cole item. It brought \$550, but the Cole litho went for the amazing sum of \$600, surely the most ever paid for any art Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell commissioned.

Posters featuring important names in circus history brought mixed prices. Portrait bills generally went higher than average, and William F. Cody's image guaranteed serious money. One sheet of Gargantua and Leitzel sold for \$1000 and \$550 respectively. Two Ringling-Barnum Wallenda bills closed at \$350 and \$175, and a Barnum and Bailey Bird Millman piece sold for \$475. Four Clyde Beatty posters, two from Cole Bros., and two from Hagenbeck-Wallace, were available. The two Cole one sheets pulled down \$275 and \$250 while the two from Hagenbeck-Wallace went for \$275 and \$150, all four of which were relatively low. Posters of other headline performers sold for no more than average, and one didn't make the reserve, indicating that the subject matter was not an important consideration in determining prices.

Lithographs which were beautiful or had a striking design invariably commanded premium prices, regardless of their subject, title, date, printer, or scarcity. The most aesthetically pleasing poster at the auction, depicting Barnum and Bailey equestriennes in 1897, closed at \$1600, four times above the average cost, and twice its estimate. A 1935 Cole Bros. bill, featuring a bareback ballerina and representing one of the most artistic products ever created at Erie Lithograph, went high. The stratospheric prices on some items, the Ringling and Hagenbeck-Wallace clown bills for instance, were a result of both the broad appeal of their subject, and artistic merit.

The bidders were a diverse group including circusiana collectors, poster collectors, western Americana collectors, decorative arts devotees, and a number of people who wanted to pur-



Buffalo Bill lithographs have the widest appeal of any show posters. The 1908 example went for \$2800.

chase a specific lithograph. The latter group included P.T. Barnum's great-grandson who bought a Barnum portrait bill. The circus fraternity was composed of fans and collectors from the area, two tent show executives, and representatives of the country's three largest private collections. About a quarter to a third of the offerings were purchased by this group, four of them being particularly heavy buyers.

The auction itself had moments of high drama. During much of the event the twenty or so active bidders on the floor competed against one another, a phone bidder in Germany, and a Phillips employee who represented the mail bids. The generally furious activity halted as the most recent bid was relayed to the phone buyer who then decided to go higher or stop. His intention was then conveyed to the auctioneer who in turn announced it to the audience. After the Barnum and Bailey twelve sheet was sold, spontaneous applause broke out. Many times two bidders went back and forth on a piece long after the others had dropped out. When the hammer fell on the last item, a Tom Mix one sheet which brought \$225, approximately three hours after starting, champagne was opened as the participants lined up to pay for their items. A sense of camaraderie pervaded the room as the weary veterans compared notes and showed each other which pieces they had purchased. It was a strangely

This 1897 poster was probably the most beautiful offering at the auction. It carried a \$1600 price tag.



delightful interlude, underlying which was the unspoken feeling that they had all just shared a unique experience.

Things will never be the same again as the auction clearly showed that quality circus posters command high prices. Bob Parkinson, head of the Circus World Museum's library and research center and an expert on circusiana values, contends that many circus collectors have been out of touch with the national poster market. One collector attended the auction to learn what his holdings were worth, and left a surprised and happy man. Circusiana dealers have raised their prices somewhat beyond inflation in the last few years, a trend which presumably will now accelerate.

This is unfortunate for those building collections. It is virtually impossible for a collector to own more than a few pre-1930 bills unless he is willing and able to make a large expenditure. Parkinson notes that because it has become so difficult to assemble a large collection, the typical collector sets limits on the types of material, shows, and periods which he will attempt to acquire. Collectors today are forced to be satisfied with less, partially because of cost, and partially for other reasons such as limited availability, a result of the significant movement of material to public institutions in the last two decades. The day of the large general collection is over.

The situation was much different during the golden age of circus collecting in the 1930s and 1940s when at least fifteen private collections were assembled which if still intact today would rank among the half dozen most extensive. None of the owners of those collections is still alive; Bill Kasiska of Baraboo, Wisconsin, who died in 1978, was the last of the group. Their holdings have been acquired by other collectors, or by institutions such as the Circus World Museum, and Illinois State University. Today, four mega-collections exist, three in private hands, and the fourth at the Circus World Museum. All four are more comprehensive than any built forty or fifty years ago. Perhaps three or four other collections are on a par with the big ones of the 1930s and 1940s.

Curiously few of the big collections of the past had great pre-1930 lithograph holdings. They simply weren't available. The vast majority of surviving nineteenth and early twentieth century circus posters never served the purpose for which they were created—advertising the show. They exist today solely because Strobridge Lithograph Company of Cincinnati, Ohio never threw them away. Probably overruns which Strobridge couldn't unload on the shows, they gathered dust on the company's shelves, some for sixty years, as obsolete inventory. A handful of collectors in the 1930s

and 1940s wrote Strobridge and were sent a few, but Ralph Hastings of Huntington, West Virginia, and Lee Allen Estes of Lexington, Kentucky both made massive acquisitions from the firm. Each obtained thousands of sheets, and many, many duplicates. The duplicates from these two groups have been working their way through the market for the last thirty years (slowly until the last fifteen), and are the source of the increased availability in recent times. Nearly all the pre-1920 bills auctioned at Phillips were originally owned by them.

Older posters are a paradox in that before the late 1960s their availability was sorely limited, but when it was possible to buy them their prices were relatively much lower. In the last fifteen or so years more have come on the market than ever before, but at prices at least ten times pre-1969 values. This is probably the result of that oddity of economic circumstance where availability actually creates demand.

For forty years the only dealer who handled large numbers of nineteenth and early twentieth century posters was P.M. McClintock of Franklin, Pennsylvania. In the 1930s and 1940s he sold them for under \$10 each; in the 1950s and early 1960s for around \$20 each; and by the middle 1970s, in the last fine lot he ever dealt, a wonderful group of 1881 half sheets from various circuses, for the then high price of \$225 each, which would be a steal today.

Other types of circusiana have not been affected as much as lithographs. With a few exceptions, letterheads, programs, route books, and the like, have little appeal except to circus collectors. Nineteenth and early twentieth century pieces are rarely available from dealers, but when they are prices are generally in the \$50-\$150 range. This isn't excessive as Spencer Chambers, who was the leading dealer of everything but posters and photographs in the golden age, sold the same quality items for around \$10-\$20 in the 1940s at a time when availability was much greater. The comparative values are about equal when forty years of inflation is taken into account. Supply often outstrips demand for material after the 1930s. Ringling-Barnum programs from the 1940s and 1950s are a particular glut on the market.

Prices are much higher for any material which has a market beyond circus collectors. Oddly enough, older circus envelopes with the postage stamps still attached are expensive because of their appeal to philatelists. Approximately a hundred of them, including many rare examples going back to the 1850s, were sold as a lot for almost \$4000 at a New York stamp auction in September 1983. Anything from the Buffalo Bill Wild West sells higher than an equivalent item from

a circus simply because a large number of Buffalo Bill and western Americana collectors are in that market. Buffalo Bill collectors, in fact, recently formed their own organization.

The most striking recent example of this phenomenon occurred when fifty-one lots of material relating to James A. Bailey were auctioned in New York in July 1979. A gold mine to the researcher, the documents included such astonishing pieces as the contract between Barnum and Bailey in 1887, letters from Bailey in the 1860s and 1870s, numerous letters with important historical content from P.T. Barnum and William F. Cody to Bailey, and letters containing eyewitness accounts of the death of Jumbo. Almost all items sold above their high estimate, with the 1887 contract going for \$1600, and the letters relating to Jumbo's demise for \$950. The total group brought almost \$20,000. These were exceptional items, ones P.M. McClintock used to call "museum pieces," and, indeed, among the most active bidders were the University of Texas, Princeton University, and the Bridgeport, Connecticut Public Library. Their representatives, not private collectors, drove up the prices, and bought most of the lots.

Few, if any, collectors purchase circusiana with an eye on its future value; nevertheless, a collector with pre-1930 material acquired over a decade ago has the satisfaction of knowing that it is almost certainly worth more than he paid for it, and his lithographs, Buffalo Bill items, and some other pieces are perhaps the best investments he ever made. Can he expect a bonanza by selling it? The answer is complex. If he can interest an auction house in handling his material, or if he circulates a list of individual items he possibly can do quite well. There are, however, no sure bets. His material might go on the block at a time when prices are depressed, or he may find buyers for only a small percentage of the items on his list. An alternative is to contact another collector, a dealer, or an institution and negotiate a price. While this is obviously a less risky and time consuming path, the potential financial reward is probably smaller. The cautious advice is to thoroughly study the options before making a decision.

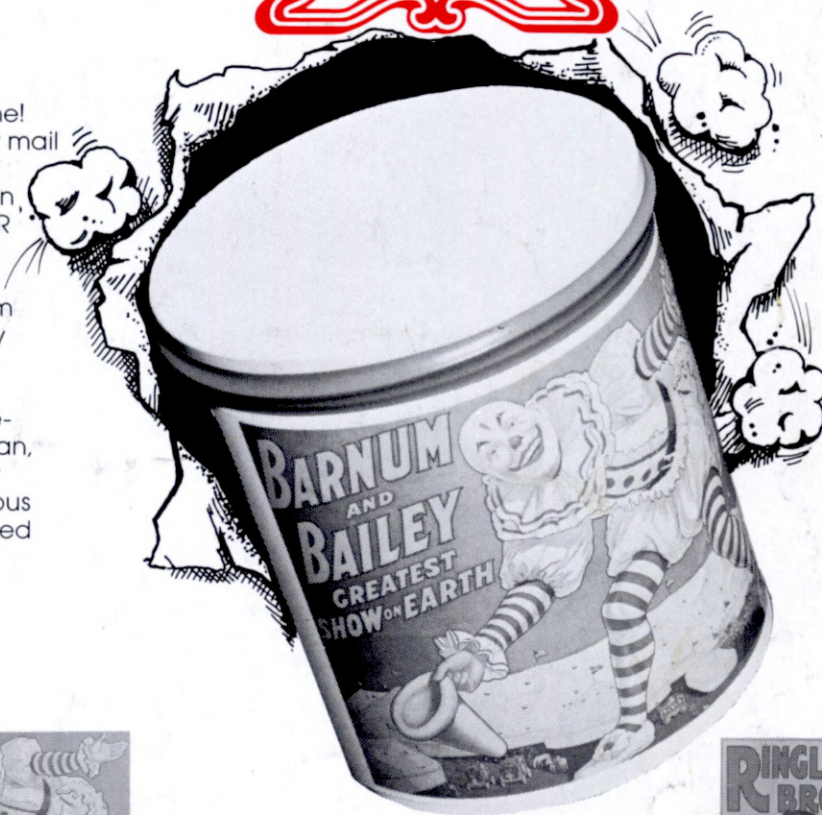
In spite of the high finance, the real joy of collecting remains the excitement and pride of acquisition, the filling in of a run, the studying of the material, and the sharing of it with others. The same impulses which led Billy Allee, the first circusiana collector, to beg heralds, couriers, and posters from the advance car crews in the 1880s motivate his spiritual heirs today. The urge to acquire is timeless. While its nature has changed, circus collecting will continue as long as anyone asks a shop keeper for the litho in the window.

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